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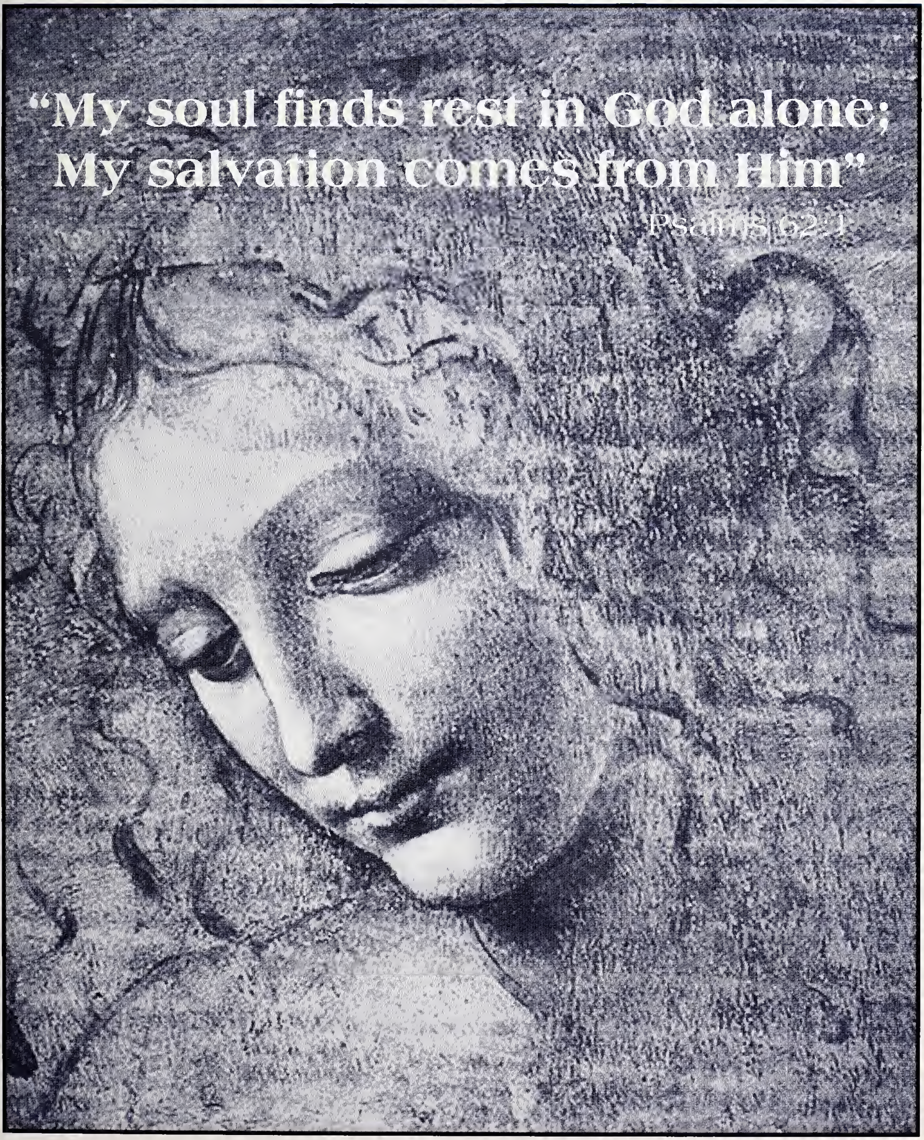
# CAROLINA christian



"My soul finds rest in God alone;
My salvation comes from Him"
Psalms 62:1

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# CAROLINA christian

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# The Measure of a Church.....

**Dennis Conner**

What is the true measure of a church? That's a question a lot of churches are wrestling with in these times. By what standards can we evaluate whether or not a church is approved by the Lord?

These important questions are answered—if not completely, then in large measure—by this text.

As Paul writes to the believers in Thessalonica, it is a young church that has made remarkable strides in its growth. It is a maturing church. These young disciples were seldom far from Paul's heart and mind, as evidenced by the fact that he and his associates were in constant prayer for them. In that prayer we find an indication of just how much they had matured. He writes that they are thankful for three things: your work produced by *faith,* your labor motivated by *love,* and your endurance inspired by *hope* in the Lord Jesus Christ.

These three virtues have been called "a brief definition of true Christianity" (John Calvin). At the very least, they are the evidence of the quality of a church's life and ministry. Whatever our vision of the church might be, it would be woefully incomplete if it did not include working faith, laboring love, and enduring hope.

## *Your Work of Faith*

In Scripture faith has always been viewed as more than simple belief and acceptance. There must be some observable evidence for the claim of faith, and that evidence is work. The faith of the Thessalonian believers was clearly and powerfully at work: the acceptance the gospel of Christ had been accompanied by persecution at the hands of Jews, but they endured it with joy in the Holy Spirit (v. 6); their example as followers of Christ was now known throughout the entire region (v. 7); they were vocal and energetic in their proclamation of the teaching of Christ (v. 8); and their lives had undergone a radical transformation that had gotten the attention of people throughout the region (v. 9). Theirs was no passive faith, but was an active, dynamic faith that evidenced the depth of their trust in and commitment to Jesus Christ.

## *Your Labor of Love*

Love, too, is an action word. "Faith works, but love labors." *Labor* here refers to hard, difficult, strenuous effort. The Thessalonians were exerting themselves because of their love for Christ. Love has everything to do with our motive for service to God and to other people. Why do you do the things you do for Christ? Some Christians labor out of fear. Others do it out of duty, knowing that it is expected of them. Both, however, are inadequate. Love is selfless. Love serves because it wants to. Love feels that it cannot do anything less!

"Whatever our vision of the church might be, it would be woefully incomplete if it did not include working faith, laboring love, and enduring hope."

There existed in Thessalonica an authentic love for God (as evidenced by their working faith) and for one another. Regarding their love for each other, Paul would later express his thanks that "the love every one of you has for each other is increasing" (2 Thess. 1:3). In Scripture there are a number of observable ways that we can love each other: love bears with others (Eph. 4:2); love helps other people carry their burdens (Gal. 6:2); love encourages others (5:11); love forgives (Eph. 4:32); love serves. In a time when people were being ridiculed and attacked for their faith, every one of these ways of actively loving was needed, and the Thessalonians were apparently doing it. Love was more than an empty, hollow profession in this church. Rather, it was an active quality that was in abundant supply..

### *Your Endurance Inspired by **Hope***

What was it that enabled these young believers to hold on in the tough times and not give up in their new-found faith? What was it that kept them hanging on in spite of the odds? What was it that undergirded their willingness to suffer because of what they believed? What gave them stability when everything else around them seemed so shaky? It was their conviction—their expectation—that Jesus Christ was coming back one day to take them home. Paul acknowledged their unswerving hope in v. 10, "And you wait for God's Son, whom God raised from the dead, to come from heaven. He is Jesus, who saves us from God's angry judgment that is sure to come." Because of this hope they were willingly and patiently enduring persecution.

"Hope is the motive power by which faith continues to work and love to toil, even though we encounter strong opposition..." It is still true for the church today. These are difficult times in which we live. What is it that keeps us from succumbing to the alluring voice of our culture?

What enables us to hold on when the circumstances of our lives seem to say that God has forgotten us, or that He is powerless to do anything? What enables us to persevere when at every turn society is ridiculing the notion of faith in Christ? It can only be the courage we derive from the sure conviction that this life is not all that there is; the conviction that one day Christ will return and He will take us home to the Father.

### *Conclusion*

If Paul were to write a letter to us today, how would he begin that letter? What kinds of things would he see in us? And based on what he sees in us, what would he thank God for? Would it sound anything like the letter to the church in Thessalonica?

The true measure of any church is the degree to which it is growing in faith, love and hope. How would we measure up? And how do you measure up as an individual? Are you helping this community of faith to live up to its calling by God? Is your faith active, your love laboring in service to others, and your hope firmly settled in Christ?

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# The Church and Morality:

## Restoring the Church's Moral Vision (10)

**Ron Newberry**

> **"The problem is we no longer use the term 'sin' to describe its original intent."**

"Today, the Church finds itself in the midst of a culture whose moral fabric is rotting and whose spirit is troubled. But as evening descends upon America, the prospects for Christian faith, I believe, could be bright." So writes David Wells in *Losing Our Virtue* (p. 179). However, the church must have its moral vision restored in two principle ways if it is to seize this moment.

The first principle involves courage. The church must be courageous enough to declare much of what our culture takes as normative is in fact sinful. This will require us who speak in the church as well as those who are part of the church at large to exercise some creativity and imagination as we learn how to speak about sin to a generation that has lost the capacity to sin. (In a previous article I discussed how sin has been dropped from our vocabulary and as a concept. Therefore, losing the capacity to sin is not referring to how God sees our behavior but how we see our behavior.)

Second, the church must reclaim her moral authenticity. It is one thing to understand the intellectual portion of the gospel and quite another to deposit it so deeply into our hearts that it produces heroic lives. As Wells puts it, there are too many tricks, gadgets, gimmicks, and marketing ploys being used by the modern church. In short, the church has adapted itself to the emptied-out, blinded, postmodern world (p. 180).

A friend of mine told me many years ago that his mother wanted him to talk to an old friend of the family about his soul. She told him that she knew he could baptize the fellow without having to discuss sin. He was puzzled. How can one discuss the need for salvation and the remedy for sin without discussing sin?

The church finds itself in the same dilemma. How can it talk about the consequences of sin, the need for salvation from sin without discussing sin? With that, Wells asks and attempts to answer three crucial questions: (1) What has happened to the idea of sin?; (2) What is it in us that has allowed this shift concerning how we view sin to have taken place?; (3) What is the entry point for the church into this culture where sin has been eliminated?

Let me reiterate that the vanishing of sin in our culture has nothing to do with its actual disappearance. Our capacity to view certain behaviors and attitudes as sin is what has disappeared. This shift in attitude has not just arisen in the past decade or two. This movement has been going on for a least a century. The problem is we no longer use the term sin to describe its original intent. Sin is a violation of the will of God. The evils of the world which God identifies as sin are no longer considered as "darkness in the presence of God" (p. 181). We no longer acknowledge as King David did to God in Psalms 51:4a after his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba was exposed, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight."

In the next installment, we will look into this lack of the use of the term sin and the rise of the use of the term evil to describe behaviors that God calls sinful. We will revisit from a different angle the reason sin has been dropped from our vocabulary.

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# Cheating and Character

**Johnny Melton**

According to a story in *U. S. News & World Report* (June 12, 2000, p. 24), "the principal of Potomac Elementary School, a top-ranked school in one of Maryland's lushest suburbs, resigned and a teacher was placed on administrative leave amid charges that they had rigged a statewide achievement test." To their credit, it was fifth graders who blew the whistle on the cheating. They reported that they had been "prompted to modify essay responses, provided correct answers, and given extra time to finish."

Cheating has been around for a long time. In the past, students have devised ingenious ways to cheat, and it used to be the case that teachers and administrators were diligent in their efforts to keep cheating at a minimum. Today it appears the teachers and administrators are devising the schemes for cheating. According to that same *U.S. News* story, "In New York City, even a scathing December report that fingered 52 educators at 32 schools for myriad cheating infractions failed to deter such behavior: A follow-up review, released last month, charges that teachers, paraprofessionals, and librarians in five schools tampered with recent test scores."

Some critics of standardized tests say the teachers and administrators are not to blame for cheating, instead they blame test-performance-based bonuses for creating a "pressure-cooker climate" that drives them to do anything to boost scores. Jeanne Allen, president of Washington, D.C.'s Center for Education Reform, begs to disagree. "The cause [of cheating] is not the test, not the standardsmovement, but some character flaw. These tests...are challenging, but they reflect what should be taught in various grades, and if educators are cheating, it means they don't have the ability to get these kids to learn, which means they shouldn't be teaching in the first place."

Ms. Allen's observation is on target. The cause of cheating is "some character flaw."

The author of the *U.S. News* article, Carolyn Kleiner, concludes regarding this latest cheating scandal, "Whatever the cause, experts agree that the ones who lose most when educators tamper with tests are students." She cites

Edward Stancik, special commissioner of investigation for the New York City public schools, "If kids have had a teacher giving them the correct answers, or telling them when things are wrong, then it is very easy for them to justify cheating themselves." Most of us already knew that.

The truth is students usually live up to—or down to—the expectations of their teachers. Back in 1996, a Rutgers University professor, Don McCabe, reported the following research: In colleges with an honor code thirty percent of the students admitted to cheating on exams, while at colleges without an honor code forty-five percent of the students admitted to cheating (*USA Today,* 3/11/96).

Take Michael Jordan and his relationship with his college coach, Dean Smith, as an example. Jordan left the University of North Carolina to play in the NBA with one year of college eligibility remaining. According to an article in *Vanity Fair,* he did so reluctantly. He has remained passionately committed to his old school and old coach, Dean Smith. As a pro, Jordan often wore Carolina shorts under his Bulls uniform and he would check in with Smith regularly, considering him as a kind of second father. Jordan not only left Carolina with great discipline and ability but he says he took away something more—a sense of right and wrong and how you are supposed to behave in life. Several years after graduating from the university, he and a friend returned for a college game. They drove up to Chapel Hill late and the parking lot was full. His friend noticed that a handicapped marked parking space was available and suggested that Jordan use it. He responded, "Oh no, I couldn't do that. If Coach Smith ever knew I had parked in a handicapped parking zone, I wouldn't be able to face him."

The problem is not that our children are dumb, nor is it that our educators are inept, the problem is that the virtues of integrity and discipline are not valued, and they are not modeled, as they ought to be. The proverb still holds true: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).

---

*Johnny Melton preaches for the Washington Church of Christ in Washington, IN, and is a former editor of* ***Carolina Chritian.*** *He can be contacted at PO Box 15, Washington, IN 47501-2866.*

# Christians Suffer Loss in El Salvador Quake........

*e*ditor's Note = *The following letter was received from Don Yelton, a deacon of the Hendersonville Church of Christ in Hendersonville, NC. We urge all our readers to thoughtfully and compassionately consider this appeal.*

**Magnitude 7.6 Earthquake Hits El Salvador and Central America**

**More than 700 dead, thousands homeless**

**Churches of Christ: 3 killed 140 – 160 families lost their homes**

**Dear Christians,**

We ask for your help once again, knowing how very generous you have always been. We ask in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord with our pledge to do everything we can to help the poorest ofthe poor without regard to anything else, but matching their need to the help you and others provide. Most of all we beg for your prayers for our brethren and the people in Central America who were caught in the midst of a terrible earthquake.

Jonathan Nelson, missionary, says:

"I just thought it was a normal tremor. I knew when I came down here that they had tremors every once in a while. So when it started, I just thought, "Wow, this is interesting!" But then when I saw the fear of death rush into the faces of everyone around me, I figured I'd join them. It was so bizarre. I was scared to death that I was going to die or something, but I was in awe of what was happening. It happened at about 11:30 a.m. on Saturday while I was in the market with the family I live with. We were looking for backpacks for the kids, because they were supposed to start school today.

And then everything started shaking. Everyone ran out of the stores into the street so that if the buildings started to fall we would be o.k. It was so crazy. The ground started bouncing up and down. I felt like I was walking on a big bowl of Jell-O, or a trampoline or diving board or something. Then all the buildings and street signs and telephone poles and pretty much everything just started swinging back and forth like they were about to fall over. Then, just like that, it stopped.

Today I went with some people from church to take food and supplies to some of the badly damaged areas. It is amazing how bad some places are. It's going to take at least this year and probably a few more to clean everything up. There are hundreds of little towns that have been almost completely destroyed that haven't made the news. I think

*(continued on next page)*

# ......What Is Heaven All About?

**Peter Rode**

An 85 year old couple, having been married for almost 60 years, died in a car crash. They had been in good health the last ten years mainly due to the wife's interest in health food and exercise. When they reached the pearly gates, as the story goes, Peter took them to their mansion which was decked out with a beautiful kitchen and master bath suite and Jacuzzi. As they "oohed and aahed," the old man asked Peter how much all this was going to cost. "It's free,"Peter replied, "this is heaven." Next they went out back to survey the championship golf course that the home backed up to. They would have golfing privileges every day and each week the course changed to a new one representing the best golf courses on earth. The old man asked, "How much are the green fees?" Peter replied, "This is heaven. You play for free." They then went to the club house and saw the lavish buffet lunch with the cuisine of the world laid out. "How much does it cost to eat," asked the old man. "Don't you understand yet?" This is heaven. It's

*(continued on next page)*

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*(El Salvador continued)*

the only places that made the news are San Salvador and Las Colinas Santa Tecla (where the landslide was), and possibly San Miguel (the place where I live). We spent a lot of time in a town called San Augustine. The Church of Christ there was completely destroyed, along with loss of the homes of the members. I almost started crying when we were handing out the food and clothes to them. These people didn't have much to begin with, but whatever they had is gone now. I really feel like I should say something like a speech and talk everyone I know into donating absurd amounts of money to buy beans, rice, corn, cooking oil, clothes, etc. for all the people who have been involuntarily kicked out of their homes, kicked out of their church, and kicked onto the street, but I really don't know what to say."

There are no better words than these that Jon shared with me. May God protect His children and may those of us who care be generous. Please send your contribution to:
WFR Church of Christ, (Earthquake), 3201 North Seventh Street,
West Monroe, LA 71291

A servant of Christ,
*Don Yelton*

free!" Peter replied with some exasperation. "Well, where are the low fat and low cholesterol tables?" the old man timidly asked. Peter said, "That's the best part; you can eat as much as you like of whatever you like and you never get fat and you never get sick. This is heaven." With that the old man went into a fit of anger, throwing down his hat and stomping on it, shrieking wildly. Peter and the old woman both tried to calm him down, asking him what was wrong. The old man looked at his wife and said, "This is all your fault! If it weren't for your bran muffins, I could have been here ten years ago!"

"So what is heaven really like? What images come to mind as you think of heaven."

On the other hand, Mark Twain once sarcastically maintained that in heaven, for twelve hours every day we will all sing one hymn over and over again. For me, that is hardly an inviting thought. George Bernard Shaw wrote, "Heaven, as conventionally conceived, is a place so inane, so dull, so useless, so miserable, that nobody has ever ventured to describe a whole day in heaven, though plenty of people have described a day at the seashore," (quoted by John Gilmore in *Probing Heaven: Key Questions on the Hereafter.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1989, p. 175). The interesting thing is that Shaw is right…at least when it comes to heaven as it is "conventionally conceived."

So what is heaven really like? What images come to mind as you think of heaven? Do you think of a kind of life that is exciting and fulfilling? Does heaven awaken for you a sense of anticipation, or does it evoke visions of monotonous and boring activity? Can you identify with the epitaph, *"Weep not for me, friend, tho' death do us sever. I am going to do nothing for ever and ever?"*

According to Paul, life in heaven will be "better by far" than anything this life can offer (Philippians 1:23). John wrote of heaven like this: "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes.

*(continued on page 13)*

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# Urgent Need!

(continued from page 12)

will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away," (Revelation 21:3-4). It's where the angels and the hosts of heaven are. It is the place where all the faithful of all the ages are going to gather around the throne of the Almighty and worship Him. It is where the tree of life is.

The few glimpses of heaven given in Scripture reveal a pervading sense of the holiness of God (Isaiah 6; Revelation 4-5) which had a powerful and overwhelming impact on those who were granted these visions. Isaiah wrote, "Woe is me…for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty," (Isaiah 6:5). We are also told that it's a place which human words are inadequate to fully describe (2 Corinthians 12:4). Heaven is surely among those things Paul described as "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no man has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him," (1 Corinthians 2:9)! Heaven is the destination after death for those who belong to Christ. Paul said that "to be absent from the body (is to be) at home with the Lord," (2 Corinthians 5:8). Heaven is going to be an exciting and wonderful place to be. I hope you're aiming to be there!

---

*Peter Rode serves the Friendly Ave. church in Greensboro, NC. He can be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.*

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### Sunday, March 4

| | |
|---|---|
| 9:00 a.m. | “The Beginning of the Home” – Charles Brown |
| 10:00 a.m. | “The Essentiality of the Home in Society” – Earl Edwards |
| 6:30 p.m. | Singing – Scott Crosslin |
| 7:10 p.m. | “Abraham: A Father Who Succeeded” – Eric Strother |
| 7:30 p.m. | “Preparation for Marriage” – Billy Smith |

### Monday, March 5

| | |
|---|---|
| 8:30 a.m. | “Marriage is for Those Who Love God and One Another” – Clarence DeLoach |
| 9:30 a.m. | “Threats to the Home: Materialism” – Winford Claiborne |
| 10:30 a.m. | Class: Dealing With Loss: Death – Tom Miller<br>Class: Special Situations: Caring for Elderly Parents – William Woodson<br>Class: Special Situations: Being a Single Adult – Jackie Stearsman<br>Class for Ladies: Strength of Home in Facing Trials – Dietlinde Spears |
| 11:30 a.m. | Keynote: “Commitment” – Darryl Tripp |
| 12:00-1:30 | Lunch |
| 1:30 p.m. | Family Roles: “Man in the Home – Dave Miller |
| 2:30 p.m. | Class: Mental Health: Depression – Lonnie Smith<br>Class: Conflict – Jerrie Barber<br>Class: Money Management in the Home – Paul Cantrell<br>Class for Ladies: Strength of the Home in Facing Trials – Dietlinde Spears |
| 3:30 p.m. | Questions and Answers – James Meadows & Edwin Jones |
| 7:00 p.m. | Singing – Mike Maddox |
| 7:30 p.m. | Hannah: A Mother Who Succeeded – Daniel Dalton |
| 7:45 p.m. | God’s Plan for the Home – Jerrie Barber |

### Tuesday, March 6

| | |
|---|---|
| 8:30 a.m. | “The Responsibilities of Aged Men” – Clayton Winters |
| 9:30 a.m. | “Threats to the Home: Secular Humanism” – Winford Claiborne |
| 10:30 a.m. | Class: Dealing With Loss: Death – Tom Miller<br>Class: Family Devotionals – David Pharr<br>Class: What Husbands Can Do to Help Their Wives be Better Wives – Robert Taylor, Jr. |

# he Home” March 4-7, 2001

# of Preaching Lectures

| | |
|---|---|
| | **Class for Ladies: What Wives Can Do to Help Their Husbands Be Better Husbands** – Irene Taylor |
| 11:30 a.m. | **Keynote: “Keys to Good Marriages: Communication** – Charles Huff |
| 12:00-1:30 | Lunch |
| 1:30 p.m. | **Family Roles: “Women in the Home”** – Dave Miller |
| 2:30 p.m. | **Class: Mental Health: Anxiety** – Lonnie Smith<br>**Class: Sexual Matters: Oneness in Marriage** – Bill Nicks<br>**Class: The Need for Good Literature in the Home** – Bob Prichard<br>**Class for Ladies: Aged Women Teach the Young Women** – Jane McWhorter |
| 3:30 p.m. | **Questions and Answers** – James Meadows & Edwin Jones |
| 7:00 p.m. | **Singing** - Ken Forrest |
| 7:30 p.m. | **“Samuel and Eli: Fathers Who Failed”** – Everett Spencer |
| 7:45 p.m. | **“The Home and the Church”** – Dave Miller |

## Wednesday, March 7

| | |
|---|---|
| 8:30 a.m. | **“Parenting Teens”** – Al Simmons |
| 9:30 a.m. | **“Threats to the Home: Divorce”** – Winford Claiborne |
| 10:30 a.m. | **Class: Dealing With Loss: Death** – Tom Miller<br>**Class: Essential Characteristics for a Successful Marriage** – Don McWhorter<br>**Class: Empowering Our Children to Face This Changing Society** – Sam Jones<br>**Class for Ladies: A Worthy Woman** – Mary Smith |
| 11:30 a.m. | **Keynote: “Compromise”** – Tom Walls |
| 12:00-1:30 | Lunch |
| 1:30 p.m. | **Family Roles: “Children in the Home”** – Lindsey Warren |
| 2:30 p.m. | **Class: Sexual Matters: Homosexuality** – Bill Flatt<br>**Class: Mental Health: Addiction** – Lonnie Smith<br>**Class for Ladies: Special Needs Children** – Jody Miller |
| 3:30 p.m. | **Questions and Answers** – James Meadows & Edwin Jones |
| 7:00 p.m. | **Singing** – Jim Steele, Kirby Hinds, Thomas Lizardo |
| 7:25-7:30 | Break |
| 7:30 p.m. | **“Jezebel: A Mother Who Failed”** – Dennis Murphy |
| 7:45 p.m. | **“The Heavenly Home”** – William Woodson |

**Call (865) 691-7444**
**for more information**
***James Meadows, Director***

# . . . . .Prelude to Accomplishment

**David Macy**

"When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, 'There is lifting up!' and he shall save the humble person," (Job 22:29). Often when we are at our lowest in the eyes of men, we are at our highest in Christian service and usefulness for the Master. When we are cast down we are inclined to depend on God more than ever. We usually study and pray more during times like these. During the Great Depression Americans were cast down physically and materially, but they were lifted up spiritually. Many were in dire straits for physical food, but they were filled with spiritual food. During those depressive times people read their Bibles more, prayed more, and packed meeting houses all over the country when revivals were conducted. Yes, when men are cast down and respond in the right way, God lifts them up in the ways that really matter.

Our physical weaknesses do make us humble and this is often the prelude to outstanding accomplishment in the vineyards of the Lord. "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given unto me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure," (2 Corinthians 12:7). The apostle Paul could easily have become a proud and puffed up man because of his many spiritual gifts, the churches he established, the experience of his glimpse into heaven, and the many other good works he had to his credit. But in His loving wisdom, Father in heaven did not allow it. Pride would have negated all Paul's effectiveness. God gave him an unwanted gift—unwanted, but a gift nevertheless—that was for his own good. God gave Paul a thorn in the flesh as a daily reminder of his human frailties and weakness. Three times he asked God to remove this troublesome thorn, but each time the answer was negative. Then, in time, Paul's perspective changed. He came to be thankful for this infirmity because he realized more and more that this weakness of his flesh was actually an occasion for God's power to be demonstrated. Through he weakness, Paul was made stronger spiritually.

Fanny Crosby, the great hymn writer, was a beautiful illustration of this truth. She was blinded by an incompetent physician in early childhood. Yet, she was grateful for her blindness because of the deep spiritual insight it gave her. Much of the depth in her lyrics—lyrics which have blessed the world—came out of this seeming tragedy.

So it is that the most tragic circumstances or troublesome infirmities can be a prelude to greatness in the eyes of God if we respond with unquenchable hope, undying faith, and unalterable trust.

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*David Macy serves the Murphy Church of Christ in Murphy, NC. He can be contacted at 4820 Appalachian Highway, Blue Ridge, GA 30513.*

# Against Such There Is No Law

**Paul Jarrett**

I want to begin by asking a favor of you. I want you to promise me that in the course of reading this article you will, under no circumstances, allow yourself to think for one moment about the number "8." You may think about anything else you want, but don't even allow the number "8" to enter your mind, not even for a fleeting moment. You can even think about other numbers if you want, but let me emphasize this point one last time—*do not think about the number "8!"*

Having cleared the number "8" from your mind, let me begin this article with an explanation of the title. (I trust that you did remove the number "8" from your mind.) The title is taken from Galatians 5. In this chapter Paul enumerates a number of deeds of the flesh that we are not to participate in, including such things as immorality, idolatry, jealousy, drunkenness, etc. (You aren't thinking about the number "8" are you?) Then in verses 22 and 23 he lists the fruit of the Spirit which should characterize our lives as Christians, things such as love, joy, peace, patience, etc. "Against such there is no law," he writes. (I hope you aren't allowing your mind to stray from our topic *to that number.*)

It seems to me that there is a lesson for us in the phrase, "against such there is no law." Sometimes, as Christians, we spend a lot of time spending time thinking about the things we are not to be thinking about (things like that number "8" perhaps) rather than giving our attention completely to those things against which there is no law. Even those of us who lead God's people sometimes encourage this focus, howbeit unintentionally, by dwelling on what *shouldn't* be done (I do hope you're not thinking about *that number*), rather than giving emphasis to those things which are to be encouraged. The truth is that even when we are trying to encourage positive conduct (please, do think about anything else other then the number "8"), we often tend to word our exhortations in a way that calls attention to the negative.

Perhaps we could all profit from giving stricter adherence to Paul's admonishment to let our minds dwell on those things which are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, excellent, and worthy of praise (Philippians 4:8…Ooops, sorry. Forgot about that verse number). If we gave ourselves wholeheartedly to these things (instead of letting ourselves be tempted by the

> "...We often tend to word our exhortations in a way that calls attention to the negative."

number "8," for example), we might be more successful than we often are in avoiding entanglement with the things against which there are laws.

In fact, in Romans 7:5-11 Paul seems to be saying, among other things, that there is some truth to the fact that the forbidden has an increased appeal just because it is forbidden (if you're thinking about that number, stop it!). If this is, in fact, the case then it seems appropriate that Paul, and all who follow his example, could find victory over sin by achieving a clearer focus on the things of God.

The validity of what I'm saying is seen in the fact that Paul goes on in Romans 8 (Oops…there I go again. Sorry.) to point out that it is those whose minds are set on the Spirit are able to do God's will, whereas those whose minds are set on earthly things cannot please God. (That's the key—don't even think about not thinking about the number "8.")

I hope you've benefitted from this study. I rather suppose you spent more time thinking about the number "8" than you ever have before. I also trust that you recognize that if I hadn't kept reminding you *not* to think about the number, you probably could have read this entire article without ever having that number enter your head. I wonder how often we fall victim to sin for much the same reason? How much sin would be eliminated from or lives if we simply got on with doing those things against which there is no law and quit spending so much time fretting about what we shouldn't be doing?

Why not let the peace of God guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus by means of your focusing your mind on those things against which there is no law, instead of wasting your time thinking about the number "8"?

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*Paul Jarrett preaches for the Naples Church of Christ in Naples, FL.*

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# Garbage In, Garbage Out

**David Kneip**

Has anyone ever told you that you only get out of something what you put into it? You've probably heard that from your parents or teachers regarding schoolwork. A phrase that computer guys threw around several years ago was similar – "GIGO," or, "Garbage In, Garbage Out." If you program a computer or feed it data poorly, nothing's going to work right. That's certainly true of machines, but it's true with people, too.

Let me tell you a story from the school the kids in my youth group attend. Not long ago, I was at a pep rally for the football team. I was sitting behind some freshmen, most of whom were friends with a guy in our youth group (although, thankfully, he wasn't there). These guys were giving a girl in front of them a hard time, tickling her, talking bad about her, when, suddenly, she whirled around and cussed them out. And when I say cussed them out, I'm putting it mildly. Now, I live with other Christians right now, and we don't watch movies with a significant amount of bad language. I must have lost my cool edge from college, because I blushed faster than any of the high school guys did.

But then, I thought, no big deal. Kids are kids. This must be one of the bad seeds. I hope she goes to church somewhere. Not so much a concern of mine. Until about a month later, when I saw one of the girls in my youth group, one who doesn't want to go to church very much, sitting with her at lunch and having a great time. Now it's a concern of mine.

What would you do in a situation like that? If one of your friends were associating with someone who uses foul language, would you say something to them? Would it even occur to you that that might be potentially dangerous? There have been times in my life when it wouldn't have even registered on the radar, but right now I'm especially aware of the truth in something that Jesus said once: "Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34).

I don't want this to be a little mini-sermon about why people who cuss are bad. Or, for that matter, people who drink, smoke, whatever your community frowns upon. I don't want to vilify anybody here; it's not our purpose, and it's also not especially Christian. What I do want to do, however, is caution you, as an older brother in Christ, that what's true of computers is true of us.

Garbage in, garbage out.

I don't believe that God created our bodies for sex before marriage. I don't think he created them for us to do with them as we please, especially when that involves behavior that is ultimately self-destructive. And he certainly didn't create them for actions that destroy other people, whether physically, spiritually, emotionally, or mentally. But sometimes we do them anyway, right? And where do they come from? Right now, psychologists say it's the brain. In Jesus' day, he said it was the heart. Either way, the actions, the motivations, the decisions come from inside us. Consequently, we have to guard ourselves against filling up our insides with insidious, devilish, evil things because, as Jesus said, it's out of what we're filled up with that we speak (and act). These days our senses are bombarded with images, sounds, sensations, and experiences that can only be categorized as "sinful." You guys know that you can turn on the TV, get online, or go down to the corner store or to the party where you can find the things that Jesus would have you avoid. You can find friends at school or in your town who do all kinds of bad things, tothemselves and to others. It's so easy to get de-sensitized to the garbage in the world – the sex, the language, the drugs, the bitter sarcasm, the backstabbing, the gossip, the violence – that you don't even notice it anymore. And when you don't notice it, it's easy to bring it into your life, just like the girl in my youth group

Jesus often ended his parables with a statement like this: "If you have ears to hear, then listen up!" We can pray for God to give us eyes to see and ears to hear as Jesus did. I encourage you to pray that prayer. It may mean some major life changes for you, or it might mean that your relationships with friends and Christian brothers and sisters will change a lot. You may find yourself walking away from some relationships that aren't healthy. Or, you may find yourself more confident in telling others, gently, about Jesus and what he has done in your life. It will be hard, but the benefit, friends, is eternal.

"For out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:34-37).

---

*David Kneip formerly served as the minister to the youth at the Cole Mill Rd. church in Durham, NC. Presently he is a graduate student at Abilene Christian University in Abilene, TX.*

# God's Patient Work

**Amos Allen**

The Hebrews were made prisoners of war for 70 years. They also spent 40 years getting to know one another in the desert. Moses was given 80 years to prepare himself for leading the Jews to the Promised Land. God left the Israelites in Egypt for 400 years. Abraham and Sarah were promised a son and given 25 years to think about it. Noah had lots of time to work on his yacht.

Why does God take so long to do some things? (I know the '1000 years equals a day' verse, but God also knows what time means to us.) I have an idea about it, and two suggestions for those who wait for God. But before you read my idea and suggestions, let me share some information with you.

Both Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris and St. Peter's Basilica in Rome took about 100 years to build. The cathedral of Cologne, Germany took over 600 years. We don't know how long the pyramids of Egypt or Mexico were under construction, but we can safely assume it was a long time.

I recently repaired a hinge on a small wooden box my wife uses in her kindergarten classroom. The original screws were too small, so I inserted larger ones that don't match the remaining screws. And I don't care. The children will soon have the lid totally removed from the box,anyway.

Notice any difference between the attitude that built Notre Dame and the one that repaired the box?

Both of my children have quilts that were made by their mother's mother. A quilt is not something you work on while waiting for the traffic light to change. I have a hard time imagining where to even begin to produce such a work of art.

Sequoia trees of California can reach heights of 300 feet. Some of the oldest are thought to be three to four thousand years old. An adult tree can weigh 2,000 metric tons (or more).

My idea is God uses time to create quality and depth. Skilled craftsmen are just that because they were patient enough to learn. An effective therapist or doctor listens before diagnosing. Good mechanics go over the engine carefully. Loving parents give attention and not just rules. The caring spouse creates a place for the other to grow in.

To get out of Egypt, Moses was needed, not Aaron or Miriam (Numbers 12). Isaac needed parents like Abraham and Sarah, not Mr. and Mrs. Lot (Genesis 13, 19).

God takes his time because we need to take ours. He created us to do a better job when we don't rush. True wisdom and great love aren't developed overnight. A life of depth and meaning is gained through many patient efforts in the right direction.

This is what I see: God takes his time because it's best for us. He wants to build cathedrals and grow sequoias and stitch quilts in our lives, and that kind of quality and strength takes years. Do we want to be a Notre Dame or a treehouse? A sequoia or a squash? If we choose to take the time and make the effort, consider these suggestions:

1. *Learn to pray and do it.* Jesus, Paul, Peter, Moses, Abraham, David, Samuel, Nehemiah, Hannah, Mary, Simeon and several others show us that time spent talking and listening to God changes us for good like nothing else can.

I read from a list of names and situations when I pray to help me stay focused. I picture the people, give thanks for them and ask God for specific blessings, as well as what he knows they need.

Prayer can easily become boring and mechanical. Ask God for the grace and desire to talk with him regularly.

Read books on how to pray, and practice what you read.

2. *Read from the Bible.* There is no substitute for this, either. This discipline has been used by God to change people for good in every age and in every place.

Like prayer, Bible reading can be done without meaning. It is helpful to understand how to read the Bible, and what you purpose is when reading. If you are reading devotionally, read the Psalms. Read one (or two or five or...) a day and let the words influence your prayers for that day. And read it aloud.

Try different translations and versions. Read to someone else.

The list of what we can do to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ is much longer than the two listed above, but they are foundational. They are called 'disciplines' because it takes discipline to practice them, and because you become a discipled Christian as you do them.

Ricky Scaggs played his mandolin with renowned bluegrass legends Bill Monroe, Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs by the time he was 10 years old. Such experiences caused him to, in his own words, "set my face like flint" toward becoming a top-notch musician and performer. In 1985, the country music industry honored Scaggs as its performer of the year.

Our churches need spiritual giants, people with a Scaggs like discipline, women and men of great faith and love. Our communities need salt and light (Matthew 5). Our schools need people of deep character. It will only happen as we take the time to let God grow and build us. This world needs Christians to set their faces like flint toward God in prayer and Bible reading.

May the grace of Christ be with you.

---

*Amos Allen preaches for the Meadowbrook Rd. church in Asheboro, NC. He can be contacted at 631 Meadowbrook Rd., Asheboro, NC 27203*

# The Promise of Worship......

**Ron Newberry**

The extravaganza is over! Super Bowl XXXIV is finished and the world championship of professional football has been settled. I am sure that there are a lot of wives who are glad that football season is over and the most hyped sporting event of the year is history.

There are two clues that this game is the single greatest game in sports each year. For one thing, it's called the *Super* Bowl. It's not the *Important Bowl* or the *Great* Bowl or even the *Excellent* Bowl. No, it's the *Super* Bowl.

The second clue that this football game is big, really big, is the use of Roman numerals. Any event marked by Roman numerals must be huge. World War I. World War II. Super Bowl XXXIV. That's grander I suppose than Super Bowl 34. Super Bowl 34 just isn't majestic enough, is it?

I wonder if using that strategy would boost attendance? Sunday School—IX a.m., Worship—X a.m., Sunday Evening services—VI:XXX p.m., Wednesday evening Bible study—VII:XXX p.m. I don't know. Doesn't do much for me.

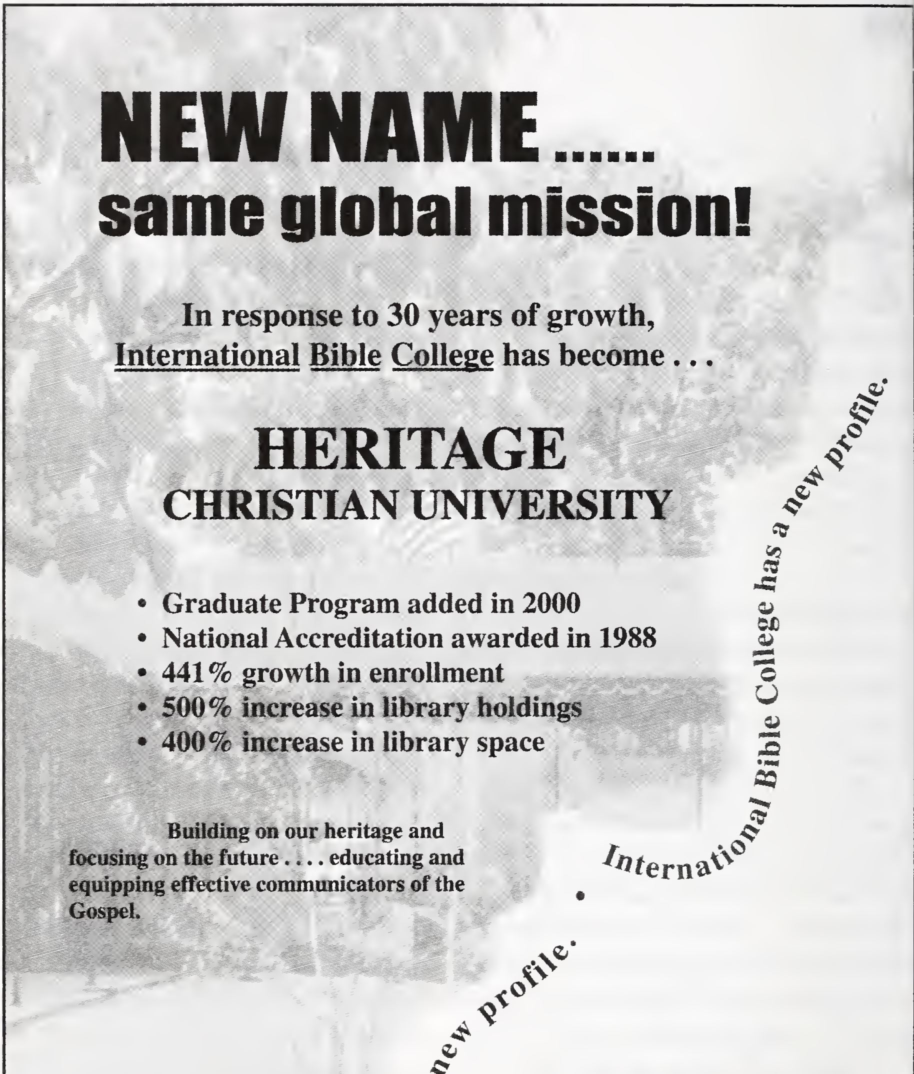
One of the major criticisms of the Super Bowl is that it rarely lives up to all the hype. In fact, with all the other activities surrounding the game, the game itself is almost anticlimactic. Fans should be able to expect the game to deliver the excitement it promises.

That brings me to an important question. Shouldn't our worship services deliver what they promise? Maybe you're thinking, "That depends on what they promise." Fair enough. What does worship promise?

Doesn't worship promise an encounter with the Holy One? Doesn't it pledge communion with others of like faith? Doesn't it vow to bring us into the presence of the awesome God? Surely the answer to all three questions is yes, yes and yes.

Then why do we often miss out on the encounter with God? Why do we sometimes seem to skip the communion with one another? Why do we frequently feel as if we stand alone in His presence? Could part of the problem be traced to our own hearts instead of what's actually happening in the worship? I don't mean that we cannot or should not strive for excellence in worship—quite the contrary. I'm just suggesting that maybe the place to start with making worship real and meaningful is not on externals as much as on our own hearts.

See you Sunday at X a.m.



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# Watching Your Wait........

**Kent Massey**

The decorations have been put away. Presents have been exchanged. Home is returning to some semblance of order. Another holiday season has passed. But all the festivities, food and fun have left an unwanted guest behind. Maybe the sweater fits more snug than it used to. Or you don't remember the pants being so tight. It's more difficult to bend down and tie your shoes in the morning. Many of us know the feeling of facing the New Year with a few extra pounds we need to shed.

Marketing experts tell us that more gym memberships are bought in January than any other time of the year. Sales of diet aids also increase sharply. Resolutions are made to be more health conscious in our eating.

The government attempts to help us in our eating habits by telling us how many servings are suggested per day per food group. A serving of pasta is a half–cup, cooked. That equates to about 32 strands of spaghetti, a trifling four swirls of the fork. Ten french fries make up a serving. You are only allowed one–sixteenth of a frosted cake (the equivalent of one finger width slice). I just don't know many people who eat like that, do you?

Restaurants aren't going to be of much help. They have found a clever marketing strategy that serves huge amounts of food on the plate. We think that this heaping plate is just a single serving of food, and that not to eat it all, and to request a doggie bag, is just another indication of how health–conscious we can be.

Lawrence Lindor has coined a phrase to define this problem. He calls it "portion distortion." People think they are eating like birds, but that's true only if those birds are vultures! This may be a part of the expanding American girth.

Portion distortion is not a new dilemma, as demonstrated by the children of Israel in the wilderness. In Exodus 16, God challenged the Israelites to live on the portion of quail and manna that He provided for them for that day. It was enough for them to live on, but it was a strictly regulated portion. On the day before Sabbath they were to gather enough for two days so that the people could rest on the Sabbath. When people tried to stash some extra away during the week, the manna would start to stink and become maggot ridden.

This old story begs a modern day question—Why are we so reluctant

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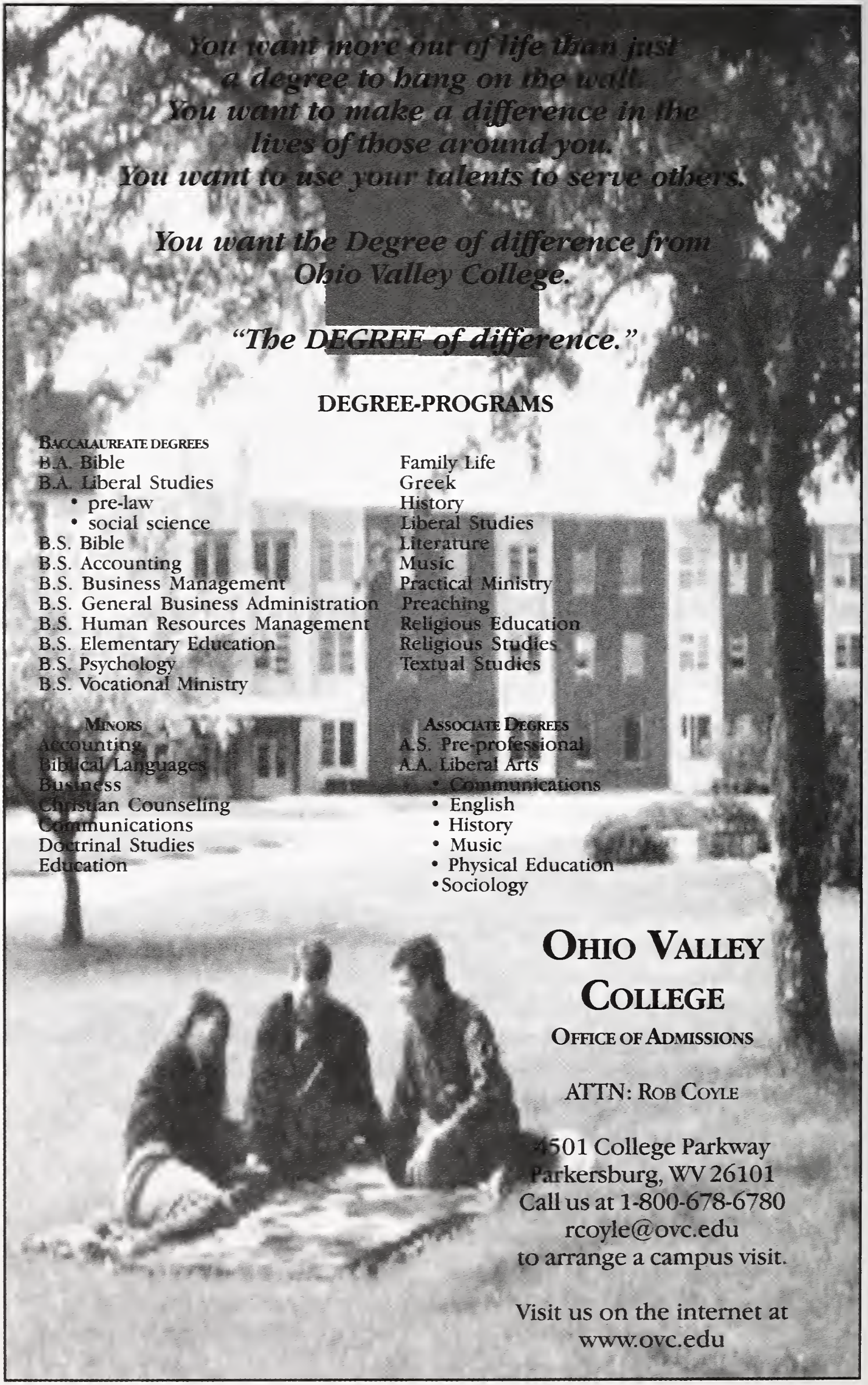

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to accept the basic portions that God gives us? Why were the Israelites—and we for that matter—hungry for more than we really need?

I believe it to be a trust issue. We tend to gobble more than our fair share in life when we fail to believe that God will take care of us today, tomorrow and the day after. The big question of life is not, "Do we believe in God?" The bigger question is, "Do we believe in what God says?" Our doubts of His faithfulness lead us to want to have as much as we can for right now because of our concern that He won't take care of us tomorrow. Because we don't believe that God will be as good to us tomorrow as He is being today, we eat, spend and extend ourselves to the max. God provided the Israelites with manna for 40 years one day at a time, resting on the Sabbath. Not once did they ever get up and wonder, "Is the manna going to come today?" They knew God would deliver. Jesus promised that when we put first things first, we would not be left hungry, thirsty or naked (Matthew 6:31-33).

God has never let you down. He may not always do what you want, but He always does what is right and what is best. Maybe your earthly portions aren't what you think you need or deserve, but He will always give just what you need for today.

As the New Year blooms before us and each day unfolds a different petal, I hope that we will remember God's faithfulness and trust in His goodness. Because that is the quickest cure for any distortion in our earthly portions.

*Kent Massey serves the Providence Road church in Charlotte, NC. He can be contacted at 4900 Providence Rd., Charlotte, NC 28226.*

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**Peter Rode**

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EEM serves as a primary literature resource for strengthening churches, supporting campaign mission efforts in Eastern Europe and Russia, and is the only ministry that prints, distributes, and conducts routine follow–up in every country. Currently, EEM translates and prints in more than nineteen languages. Over 8 million Bibles and related materials have been printed and distributed in Eastern Europe and Russia. EEM's ministry includes:

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- Distributing Children's Bibles to World Wide Youth Camps throughout Russia and Ukraine.

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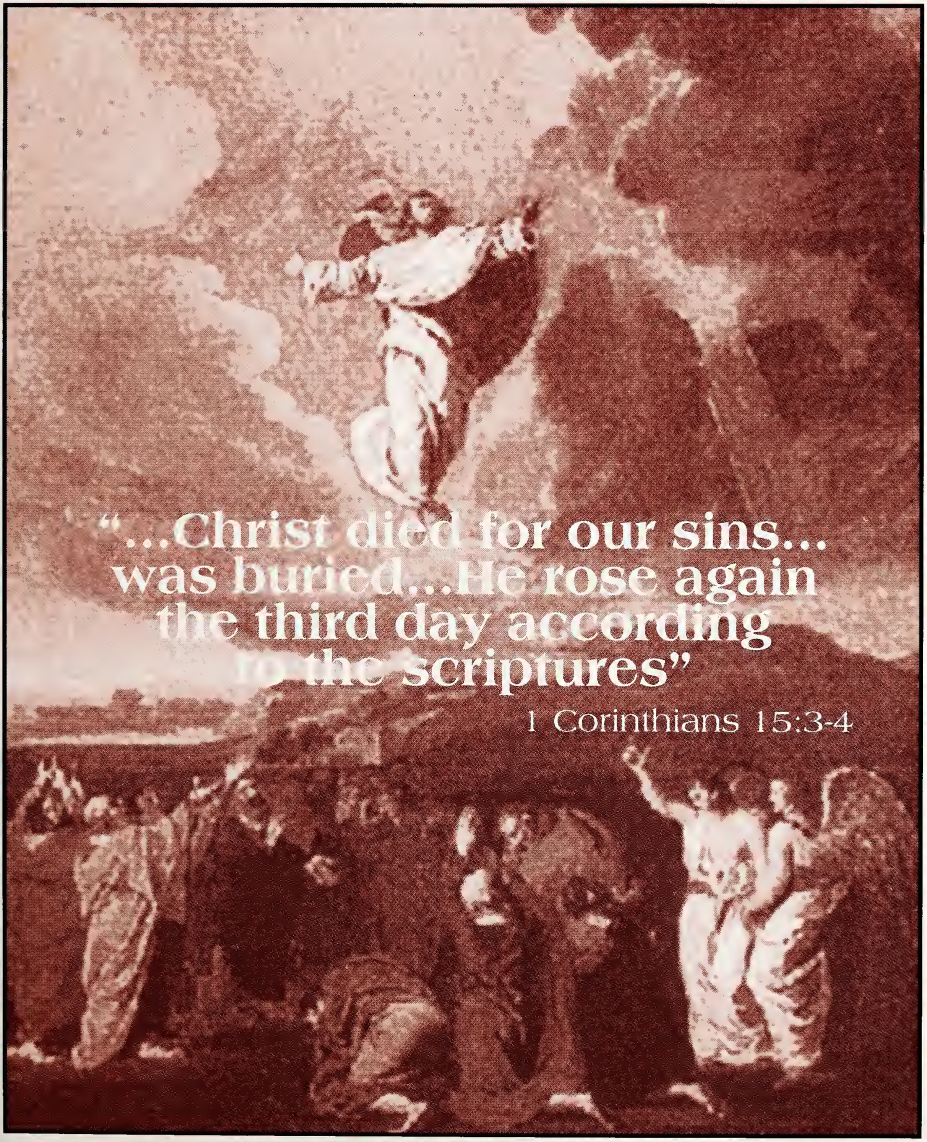

"...Christ died for our sins...
was buried...He rose again
the third day according
to the scriptures"

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

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# Forgiveness in the Concrete . . .

## (Matthew 18:21-35)

**Dennis Conner**

*Forgiveness.* It's a great word. Amen? We love it! Amen? We want it! Amen? And we live it! Oops.

A child psychologist who had written a popular book on patience and forgiveness in raising children was undertaking a little home improvement project, repairing a section of his concrete driveway himself. He had mixed the concrete and poured it, and was in the final process of smoothing it over. A little boy next door, upon spying the freshly poured concrete, could not resist the temptation and rode his bike right through the concrete. The psychologist, incredulous, held his temper and began the task of smoothing out the bike tracks. He was just about finished when the little boy came riding from the opposite direction—*squish*—right through the concrete again. The psychologist jumped up in an exasperated fit, but held his tongue and, with less patience, began smoothing over the tracks once again. This time, he put up a thin rope around the section under repair, just in case. A few minutes later, the little boy came running across the lawn of his neighbor and jumped across the rope, landing squarely in the middle of the fresh concrete, and then ran out on the other side, leaving a trail of small footprints. That was it. The psychologist began yelling and screaming at the boy, sending him home crying.

Within minutes the boy's father came out onto his porch and yelled across to his neighbor, "I thought you believed in forgiveness!" To which the frustrated psychologist replied, "I do believe in forgiveness in the abstract, but not in the concrete!"

Perhaps it's the same for most of us in our practice of forgiveness. We love it in the abstract, but when called upon to do it, we struggle with it in the concrete. We are quite willing, even eager, to receive it, but giving it can be another matter entirely. There is something about the practice of Godlike forgiveness that we find so difficult. William Willimon correctly observes, "Forgiveness is not natural; it is not a universal human virtue. Vengeance, retribution, violence are more natural human qualities. It is natural for humans to defend themselves, to snarl and crouch into a defensive position when attacked, to howl when hurt, to bite back when bitten."

Peter might have thought that he was being quite generous and had even been quite successful in subduing his human impulses when he asked Jesus, "How often should I forgive, seven times?" The prevailing rabbinical opinion of the day was that one was only obligated to forgive three times, and that was it. Indeed, to the others Peter must have appeared as extremely generous. His question opened the door for a radically new understanding of forgiveness as Jesus responded, "Not just seven times, but seventy times seven." While seeming generous, Peter's question actually betrayed a stingy understanding of forgiveness. According to Jesus, forgiveness was to be abundant, without limits. To make the truth more "concrete," he told the story we find in Matthew 18: 21-35 (it would be very helpful at this point if you would take a few minutes to read the text!).

"We do find it difficult to treat others the way God has treated us."

The servant owed his master an incomprehensible sum. It has been observed that the annual tax revenue of King Herod was about 900 talents, so 10,000 talents was something like the national debt for 11 years! It was an outrageous sum! When the man plead for mercy, he asked for more time. It was a ridiculous request—a hundred lifetimes would not be enough time. It was a desperate plea and I'm quite sure that he did not expect what happened next. The master, in mercy and compassion, freely and completely forgave the entire debt!

Now, one would assume that such mercy would have had a profound impact on the servant's heart. Perhaps that was indeed the assumption of the listeners that day the story was told. What happened next is shocking. As Jesus continued, He said that the servant went out and found a friend of his who owed him money (a paltry, inconsequential sum in comparison to the amount he himself had been forgiven) and demanded payment. Isn't it interesting that the plea of his friend is exactly the same as his own? And his response? The unmerciful servant has his friend thrown into debtor's prison.

The man's reprehensible behavior is reported to the master, who is justifiably enraged by such ingratitude. Mercy, when abused, leads to justice and the master has the ungrateful man delivered to the torturers. That in itself would seem a fitting end to the story, but it wasn't. Jesus then concluded with this stinger, "So My Heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother." That ought to get anyone's attention. His point? A forgiving spirit is essential to life in the kingdom of God.

Two vital strands of truth grow out of this story. First, we are the beneficiaries of the undeserved and extravagant grace and forgiveness of God. We owed an insurmountable debt because of our sin against the holy God, but He has freely forgiven it all! And second, the only appropriate response to God's forgiveness is to practice it on others. Just as we have freely received, so we are to freely give.

There lies the rub. We do find it difficult to treat others the way God has treated us. It runs completely counter to our impulses. Still, Jesus holds out the practice of genuine forgiveness as a very real possibility. He would not require it if it were not possible.

Chris Carrier was ten years old when he was kidnaped on Christmas Day in 1974. When he was finally found, he had been burned with cigarettes, stabbed with an ice pick, shot in the head and left for dead. Somehow, miraculously, young Chris survived and recovered. The only permanent physical damage was blindness in his left eye. But who could measure the emotional and psychological damage?

In 1996, 22 years after the kidnaping, David McAllister confessed to the crime. He was by that time 77 years old, blind and dying in a nursing home. Learning of this, Chris Carrier, who had become a preacher, began visiting McAllister. Chris would read the Bible to him, pray with him, and forgave him. When asked about it, Chris replied, "I became a Christian when I was 13. That night was the first night I was able to sleep through the night without waking up from my nightmares." He went on to say that it would be selfish not to share that same peace with David McAllister. "Yes," he said, "there *is* freedom in forgiveness."

Judy Brewer is a Sunday school teacher. Some years ago she taught a class in which she asked her students to write a one–sentence definition of forgiveness. One answer in particular stuck with her. A little boy wrote, "Forgiveness is like meeting someone for the first time." When she asked the young boy what he meant, he replied, "Well, if you meet someone for the first time, there's nothing he could have done or not done to make you mad. So, forgiveness is like meeting somebody for the first time." Out of the mouth of babes.

Is there someone in your life you need to forgive? Someone you need to meet again for the first time?

We are freely forgiven that we might freely forgive.

# The Church and Morality:

## *The Spiritual Transformation of Sin (11)*

**Ron Newberry**

Even the casual observer of the events taking place in our modern culture would surely note that there has been a change in the way we as a culture view sin. In fact, sin has been all but forgotten in our culture. Why? Why is the identification of and discussion of sin so irrelevant today? In the previous articles based on David Wells' book, *Losing Our Virtue,* I have tried to point to any number of cultural dynamics that have constantly eroded our moral consciousness. Let's turn our attention to a spiritual reason why sin has been transformed.

Wells selects one word to describe the spiritual problem that has transformed the way we look at sin. That word is *pride.* This is not pride in the typical sense of arrogance or contempt for others. It is pride that has *self* forever at the center of the universe.

Oddly enough the cultural voices we hear claim that the culprit in our world leading to so many problems is the lack of healthy self-esteem. In 1997, there was a discussion in Massachusetts concerning the banning of spelling bees in school because those who misspelled a word often cried. There was a serious discussion in many quarters about banning little league baseball because so many of the children struck out so often and it hurt their self-image. This phenomenon is not isolated to the United States. I recently heard about a proposal in England to ban the children's game of musical chairs because it favored the faster and stronger children to the detriment of the self-esteem of the others.

> *"Sin at the core is always about self, its demands, its wants, its prestige."*

Are there problems in our world because someone's self-esteem has taken a beating somewhere in their lives? No doubt there are such cases. But surely the world is not crumbling down around us because we don't think highly enough of ourselves. In fact, Wells argues the exact reverse. A major part of the problem is that we think too highly of ourselves. We consider ourselves to be above average, more deserving of the highway than others, and when things go wrong it is always someone else's fault.

This attitude of thinking highly of ourselves is the heart of *pride.* The essence of pride is seeking self interest to the point that God is forsaken in order to find in the self what should be found in God.

Pride is not the only sin, but it is at the heart of sin. It ultimately leads to the religious devotion to the self. Sin at the core is always about self, its demands, its wants, its prestige. Pride takes the mundane, paltry, tawdry, insignificant aspects of life with which we become preoccupied and elevates them to the status of gods. How? By the simple fact that these things are served with a devotion that is to be reserved for God alone. When we serve the things of this world – traced directly to our own self-interests – we ultimately become our own god.

We will pick up this discussion of pride in the larger context if the transformation of sin in next month's article.

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# The Passion Week

**Richard Boese**

The events of the last week of Jesus' life, often called his "Passion" week, seem fantastic when taken as a whole out of context. It is unimaginable that a man could ride into a national capital like Jerusalem at the beginning of the week as a conquering hero and treated like the king elect. Then by the end of the same week to be executed like a common criminal by the most painful method known to man at that time. As with any event it must be kept in context and that context must be understood in order to gain understanding of the event in question. The attitude of the populace toward Jesus as well as the thinking of his personal disciples must be understood. Also the attitudes of his enemies the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Herodians must be understood in order for the passion week to make any sense.

Though it was God's will that all that happened should have come to pass, it is through these groups of men that his will was carried out. The populace who praised Jesus' final entrance into Jerusalem had some definite opinions about the Messiah and his role in Jewish history. By the time Jesus appeared on the scene most Jews held one of two opinions about the Messiah. The first opinion could be called that of the "National Messiah." This understanding of the Old Testament prophesies held that the Messiah would be a man who would appear and take up the kingship over Judea. His role was to drive out Israel's oppressors and return her to political, and religious, independence. The second belief system about the Messiah was that he would be a transcendent man/god who would establish the Kingdom of God on Earth. The common Jewish mind of Jesus' time did not hold these concepts as necessarily antithetical to each other. Instead they saw these theories as modifying and enhancing each other. With this mind set the listeners of Jesus could readily listen to him preach about the spiritual nature of his kingdom and still expect him to sit on an earthly throne.

Early in Jesus' ministry these expectations can be seen at work. After he miraculously fed the five thousand, some of those present in the crowd decided to force him to be king (John 6:15). One commentator believes that the disciples were in on the plot and that is why Jesus hurries them off to a boat before dispersing the crowd.

At the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, more of the growing sentiment in the multitudes that Jesus was the Messiah is seen (John 7:11-31). This time there is not the fervor to make him king. But there seems to be a growing sense he is the one to fulfill their dreams.

Reinforcement for this idea that the common people expected an earthly kingdom with Jesus at the head comes from within the ranks of Jesus' own disciples. Hardly had Peter made the momentous revelation that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, than the disciples began vying for the top positions in his kingdom. The first time they ask him openly about who will be greatest in his kingdom. He told them they must become as little children (Matthew 18:1-5; Mark 9:33-37; Luke 9:46-48). Even in the Upper Room, only hours before the true kingdom was established, the disciples were still arguing about who was the greatest, and thus who would have the places of honor in Christ's coming earthly kingdom (Luke 22:24-42). If the disciples, who lived with Jesus day to day and knew more about the Kingdom than anyone else, could debate to the bitter end their position and prominence in an supposed earthly kingdom; it seems safe to say that the general public understood the kingdom no better.

If the public became more sure Jesus was the Messiah as the passion week approached, the Pharisees were absolutely opposed to any coronation ceremonies as Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. This opposition had taken some time to develop. And it is important note that of all Jesus' opponents, the Pharisee's were the only group that held out hope for a Messiah. In fact they had grand dreams and plans for the day the Messiah appeared. They are the ones to be credited with keeping these hopes and dreams alive in the masses and thus creating a receptive audience for Jesus. The problem in the end was that they did not wan Jesus to be the Messiah.

The word "Pharisee" means "separatist." Their main distinguishing trait was their scrupulous care to keep the details of a body of knowledge known as the "Traditions of the Elders." They held that this wisdom held weight with the Law of Moses because it consisted of amplifications and interpretations of "The Law" which were given by Moses to the elders who had orally transferred them from generation to generation.

It is this reverence for the old ways which had won for them a solid following among the people. By the time Jesus appeared on the scene, they had control of the schools and synagogue in Galilee, in Perea, and in the Decapolis. With control of the educational system came control of the hearts and minds of the people. Additionally they were becoming a political power after defeating their foes, the Sadducees (see below), being admitted to the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, in 73 BC. As Jesus began his ministry, the Pharisees are a self–righteous religious organization, secure in their broad power base, and just beginning to taste their political power.

*"As Jesus began his ministry, the Pharisees are a self–righteous religious organization, secure in their broad power base, and just beginning to taste their political power."*

The Pharisees' theology, popularity and growing political power would seem to have primed them for the coming of the Messiah. The conditions were right. When Jesus appeared the details of their theologies seemed so similar that their hopes must have risen. Both believed in angels, proselytizing, the coming Messiah, the resurrection of the dead and a system of post resurrection rewards and punishments. Jesus may have seemed, at first, to meet their mistaken expectations of an earthly king who would make Israel free and supreme. Indeed some commentators argue that the Pharisees' first approaches to him were critical but accommodating. Representatives were sent to watch, listen and report to their superiors what he was doing and saying. These commentators agree that some Pharisees quickly understood Jesus and opposed him for his so called Sabbath breaking, his condemnation of their reverence of the traditions, his diatribes against their hypocrisy, and especially his claims to be equal with God. Still others argue that the invitations several Pharisees extended to dine with him were not only meant to observe him, but gentle efforts to win him over to their viewpoint.

These ideas work in theory but do not agree with the Biblical record. Before his ministry began infull force there were two efforts to kill him. The first came in his home town of Nazareth. Though speaking in their best interest, he insulted the audience in the synagogue concerning their lack of faith in him, the crowd attempted to throw him over a cliff (Luke 4:16-31). The second attempt came in Jerusalem. During a Passover Jesus healed a lame man on the Sabbath. This infuriated the Jewish religious leaders who were present. They went into a murderous rage when he equated himself with God. The proceeded to begin planning his death (John 5:10-18). There were more attempts to kill Jesus as his ministry progressed. By the passion week the Pharisees were prepared to kill him. From the start it seems they understood that Jesus stood against them and was not the Messiah they were looking for.

The high priests and priests of rank in the Sanhedrin were members of the Sadducee party. Though not as numerous as their religious opponents, the Pharisees, they offset their popularity by holding the positions of power in the religious hierarchy. They insured their positions by allying with the Herodians, discussed below. Their name meant "To Be Righteous." They did not believe in angels, the Messiah, the traditions, resurrection or the after life. All of these they rationalized away. They were fundamentally an irreligious political party who used their positions for self aggrandizement. To justify their religious posts with the populace they had to develop a theology. The Pentateuch and possibly the Prophets formed their scriptures. They argued skillfully but ineffectual against the Pharisees' key tenant of holding the traditions as sacred. Jesus was of no interest to the Sadducees until he began to claim he was the Messiah. This claim did not alarm them religiously since they did not hold to the doctrine of the messiah. Rather, their concern was for their political position. If Rome heard that the Jews had appointed a king and created a kingdom they would come and destroy the nation and them. When Jesus openly came to be believed in as the Messiah of the prophecies, the only solution the Sadducees could see was to kill Him (John 11:45-54).

The Herodians were the final group who played a part in Jesus' fate during Passion week A purely political party which supported the Herods and their pro-Roman policies, the one religious tenant they held was that the Messiah would come out of the line of the Herods. They had no religious interest in the debate between Jesus, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees. Their concern was aroused in the political implications of the idea that Jesus was the Messiah. Whether Jesus' supposed earthly kingdom was established for religious or political reasons, it still posed a danger to the Herods' political power, which existed at the pleasure of the Romans. For this reason they allied with the Sadducees to terminate the threat from Jesus.

Given these facts there is now a context to apply to the Passion week. One commentator has pointed out that the crisis that precipitated the death of Jesus came with the raising of Lazarus from the dead. This was done in Bethany, hardly a stone's throw from Jerusalem. This event became so popular that people regularly went over from Jerusalem to visit Lazarus and apparently upon hearing his testimony, believed in Jesus (John 12:11, 17).

But some went straight to the authorities and reported what Jesus had done. The Sadducees took the unusual step of calling a meeting of the Sanhedrin to discuss the issue of Jesus. Though not mentioned in this meeting, it seems plausible that the Sadducees were greatly alarmed because their credibility was challenged by a resurrection done at their own front door. It also seems they wanted a the consensus of their usual foes, the Pharisees. During this Council everyone aired their reasons for opposing him. The Pharisees were concerned that he was doing many miracles and themajority of the people were going over to him. The Sadducees were concerned that the Romans would come and take away their position and destroy their nation. Then the high priest, Caiaphas, rose and told them that the only thing to be done, for the good of the nation, was to kill him. The Sanhedrin agreed. (John 11:47-53)

This same event (the resurrection of Lazarus) raised the popular readiness for action to a fever pitch, which coincided with the triumphal entry (John 12:9-17). Lazarus' resurrection was so popular and was causing so many people to go over to Jesus that the chief priests also took council (possibly another Sanhedrin meeting) whether they as well needed to kill him in order to quiet the people down (John 12:10-11).

So the raising of Lazarus precipitated the crisis which made for a definite decision to kill Jesus. The Lord then immediately committed an action which would not endear him to the Sanhedrin, and especially the high priests. He cleared the Temple for the second time! The high priests were the owners of the booths of animals meant to be a sort of convenience store where people could easily pick up a sacrificial animal. The money changers were required by the rule of the high priest that the Roman denarius must be exchanged for the Jewish shekel. Jesus' raging through the temple consequently affected the high priest's income.

Shortly after this some of the crowds started to drift away, possibly realizing that he was not to be the almighty earthly king they expected (John 12:36-50). The different groups discussed above then began one at a time to see if they could trick him into a statement which would either make him unpopular with the common folk or which would convict him of something they could use as a basis for execution. The high officials tried first to trip him on the source of his authority (Matthew 21:23-27; Mark 11:27-33; Luke 20:1-8). The Herodians, supported by the Pharisees, were the next to make an assault on Jesus . (He had earlier been told by the Pharisees that Herod sought to kill

*(continued on page 14)*

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# Urgent Need!

*(continued from page 12)*

him; Luke 13:31) It's appropriate that the Herodians would raise a sly question aimed at getting Jesus in a hard place between the crowds' dislike of Rome and the Roman authorities themselves. The question was simple. Should tax be paid to Rome or not. Jesus elegantly answered them that the money belonged to who minted it. Amazed, the Herodians walked away empty handed (Matthew 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-36).

Now the Sadducees thought they would take their best shot by asking a complicated question about the resurrection, a concept they din not believe in. Jesus answered them with finesse such that one evangelist reports that they would no longer ask him questions about anything. (Matthew 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:26-40)

The Sadducees got their break as the traitor, Judas Iscariot, finally made contact with the chief priests and the Sanhedrin officers to make his infamous deal for 30 pieces of silver. Scripture says they were glad when they heard Judas' offer ( Matthew 26:14-16; Mark 14:10-11; Luke 22:3-6). It is notable that Luke records that the officials were careful to plot Jesus' capture away form the multitude which apparently supported Jesus on the whole.

The plot was almost carried off without hitch. Jesus fixed the one hitch when he mercifully healed the ear of the servant of the High Priest. He was carried away and taken before Annas, who was father-in-law to Caiaphas the high priest. This was a fairly private meeting since Annas was the co-high priest with his son-in-law, but Caiaphas appears to have been ranking high priest. Annas could not get the Lord to incriminate himself, so he sent him on to Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin (John 18:13-24).

As mentioned before, Caiaphas was the one who argued that it was expedient for one man to die that the nation might live. A series of false witnesses was brought before the Council, as the Sanhedrin was also known, but none could bring evidence of a capital crime against Jesus. Then Caiaphas asked him directly, swearing before God, whether Jesus was the Christ. To this he could not avoid answering, as he had formerly stood in silence, and he stated that he was the Messiah, the Son of God. To this Caiaphas rent his clothes and declared Jesus a blasphemer punishable by death (Matthew 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:66-70). The kangaroo court had done its work.

The Sanhedrin, with a blood lust in their hearts, bound Jesus and carried him over to the Roman court of Pilate. Pilate listened to their complaints and told them to kill him themselves When they reminded him that the Jews could kill no one without Roman approval, Pilate looked for another way out.

During the course of the conversation with Jesus the information came out that the prisoner was a Galilean. Pilate had his out. He passed the prisoner on to Herod Antipas, who had political jurisdiction over Him (Matthew 27:2; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-7). The Herodians would now have their shot at the Messiah.

Remember that Herod Antipas had been curious about Jesus for some time. He was almost sure that Jesus was John come back from the grave to haunt him. For some time now Antipas had longed to meet Jesus. The ruler was unimpressed. While he hoped for a miracle he could not get the prisoner to even speak. Herod and his soldiers joined with the Sadducees in mistreating Jesus and sent him back to Pilate. In an odd footnote toe evangelist notes that from this day Herod and Pilate were fast friends. (Luke 23:6-12).

Back at Pilate's palace. Here Pilate did his best to get out of the situation by appealing to the tradition of letting a prisoner go at Passover. Little did he realize that the High Priests had control of the crowd and would ask for the release of a common criminal over their "King." Left with nothing else Pilate tried one more out. Since he could find no capital offense in Jesus, Pilate would beat him and release him. Finally the Jews argued that Pilate would be in trouble with Rome if he released Jesus since he claimed to be a king in opposition to the Emperor.

This was a particularly crafty ploy on the Oppositions part since it was public knowledge that Pilate's mentor had been executed recently as a traitor. Sometimes all close associates of a traitor, as Pilate was, were summarily executed. So far Pilate had been spared. By using the disloyalty approach the Opposition parties no doubt meant to raise the specter of "loyal" Jewish citizens writing Rome about his unwillingness to deal with a rebel king. At this point Pilate sees his best move morally and politically was the official act of washing his hands of the affair. This was a moral response because a perplexed Pilate could find nothing worthy of killing this man. As a political response it negated the possibility the Jews could do away with a Roman prelate.

(Matthew 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:39–19:26).

The leading Jews now had what they had been striving for all evening. A "legal" warrant to get rid of Jesus. With cruel precision they had the Romans carry out the deed. And as Christ himself said, "It is finished."

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*Richard Boese and his family worship with the Yadkinville Church of Christ. He can be contacted at 1020 Lewisville–Vienna Rd., Lewisville, NC 27023; or by E-mail at: rdboese @juno.com*

# New *Churches of Christ in the Carolinas* Directory at the Printers!

The 2001 directory of *Churches of Christ in the Carolinas* is now being printed. We apologize for the delay beyond the originally announced publication date and appreciate your patience. One reason for the delay is that we have made extensive efforts to try to provide the most recent and up to date information that we could. Even at that, there were some churchesthat we either could not find current phone numbers and addresses for, or our phone calls were not returned. Still, we do believe that you will find the 2001 directory to be extremely useful.

The compilation of such a directory is no easy task, and while many people have been involved in its production, we want to give special thanks to two people in particular. First, thanks to David Pharr, editor of the *Carolina Messenger,* for providing us with information on dozens of churches he had previously collected. And then thanks to Dora Conner, who spent many, many hours on the telephone in diligent pursuit of information! Without their efforts, this directory would have been much more difficult to produce.

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# . . . Obscuring the Resurrection

### Dennis Conner

In 1947 G. R. Beasley–Murray wrote a book called *Christ Is Alive!* It is long since out of print, but in it he related a thought provoking incident from the travels of a man named W. Y. Fullerton. Fullerton had visited a reproduction of Golgotha in the tiny Swiss village of Dono d'Ossala. The shrine in the village consisted of a series of chapels in memory of various scenes from Christ's path to the cross. The first scene depicted Christ before Herod; the second, Christ being given His cross; the third, Christ taking the cross upon Himself, and so on. Beasley–Murray then describes the following scene:

"The climax of the scenes was in the church itself where there was a great picture of the cross raised, with Christ upon it, and in the skies astonished angels gazing down at the tragedy of human sin and divine love. Up to this point the path was well worn by the feet of the devout pilgrims. For years they had come to witness anew the sufferings of their savior, and doubtless had mourned and wept at the sight of His agonies. But there they had stopped. Their Christ was dead. 'Beyond the church there was another shrine,' wrote Fullerton, 'but the singular thing was that the path, well worn up to this point, now became grass covered. Evidently nobody went any further. Though it was a wet day, and the grass was long, I went to the summit, and there, behold! was found the chapel of the Resurrection! The builders of Calvary...did not stay with the dead Christ, but the people, the worshipers, never got any further... The grass–grown path was a witness that could not be disputed.'"

For many, even among those of us who believe in the historicity of the empty tomb, the doctrine of the resurrection has become a secondary doctrine. We are so captivated by the drama and meaning of the cross (as well we should be) that we find it too easy to fail to appreciate the drama and significance of the resurrection. However, we must remember that while the cross is *central* to Christian faith, the resurrection is *foundational.*

This truth is evident in the earliest Christian sermons recorded in the New Testament as the preaching of the risen Christ went hand–in–hand with the message of the crucified Christ. Without the empty tomb, Jesus is nothing more than a dead hero, another victim of political intrigue and injustice. Thus, the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ is of decisive importance to a biblical understanding of the cross and is the principal argument in support of the deity of Jesus. Intellectually, we know this, but in our preaching and teaching the raising of Christ from the dead still does not get anywhere close to the attention it deserves.

Scripture pictures the resurrection as being woven into the very fabric of our Christian experience. To some extent we recognize that in our understanding of baptism; we often note that in baptism we are "raised to walk in newness of life." Beyond that, Scripture also emphasizes that God has raised us up together with Christ and made us to sit in heavenly places in Him (Ephesians 2:6); that our justification is inseparably linked to the resurrection (Romans 4:4); that it empowers for ministry and discipleship (Philippians 3:10); and that it is the substance of our hope (1 Corinthians 15:14, 20; Philippians 3:20-21).

Further, final victory over sin was not accomplished by the cross, but by the empty tomb. As Eugene Stockstill once wrote, "The cross paid for man's sin. The resurrection defeated sin and abolished death, sin's victory." Even the Lord's supper, which we emphasize primarily as a remembrance of the death of Christ, is also a celebration of the risen Christ. We keep the Supperin anticipation of the eventual and certain return of the living Lord.

All of these facts demonstrate the divinely pervasive nature and significance of the resurrection in Christian life.

There is power in the preaching of the risen Christ; power for salvation and power for discipleship. The neglect of the doctrine of the resurrection unquestionably cripples the ministry and life of the church collectively and Christians individually. May we in the future make our way down this grass–grown path more often than we have in the past.

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# Our Greatest Failing

### Jim Mullican

1 Peter 3:8 says, "Finally, all of you, live harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble." Jesus said in Luke 14:11, "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Although humility is repeatedly stressed throughout the Bible, it yet remains the area in which most of us have the greatest trouble.

The dictionary says that humility is "having or showing awareness of one's defects; modesty, lowliness, a lack of pretension." From a Biblical standpoint, it refers to the realization of how fallible and sinful we are in comparison to God.

Yet, we do not live in an age when humility is widely valued as a virtue. Rather, the goal of most seems to be to rise to the top in the business world, to build the biggest house, to drive the most expensive car, to wear the biggest diamond, and to be subservient to no one. "If you've got it, flaunt it!" "Be all you can be!" These are the mottoes of our society. Jesus, on the other hand, said in Matthew 18:3, "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Humility would prevent most of the problems which characterize those who seek to live as Christians and spend eternity in heaven. Humility would help me remember that while the word of God is always right, my personal viewpoint regarding a given passage or topic is not infallible. Humility would help me to realize that others may be more qualified than I am to handle some areas of service. It would help me to remember that rather than being upset that I didn't get what I felt I deserved in some situation, I should be grateful that I did not get what I really deserved. Humility would allow me to confess my failings and sins instead of feeling that I have to keep up a pretense of always being right and good. And humility would constantly remind me that God's wisdom is much greater than mine, so that what He tells us to do is always for our own good, even if we can't see the reason at the present.

The opposite of humility is pride, and of that attitude Proverbs 16:18 tells us, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." Let us truly strive for humility in all we do.

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*Jim Mullican, a former associate editor of* ***Carolina Christian****, ministers to the Channelview Church of Christ. He can be contacted at 1301 Sheldon Rd., Channelview, TX 77530.*

# Everybody's Talking

**Russ Jurek**

The topic of sexuality is one which almost everyone is interested in but at thesame time makes almost everyone uncomfortable to talk about. Much of the reason for this has to do with misunderstanding, misinformation and misrepresentation of sexuality. Because of our discomfort, we have relegated the responsibility of sex education to the schools. Many Christian parents are failing to teach their children healthy, Biblical concepts of sexuality. Unfortunately, even the church has had little to do in the past with teaching or discussing sexual issues. Consequently, we give an impression that sex is something dirty or wrong. In the mean time, practically everyone else in the world is talking about sex. TV, movies, music, magazines, books, billboards, the internet are all being saturated with worldly concepts of sex. The problem is this, the concepts that the world has concerning sexuality are mostly wrong, sinful and dangerous. Christians have the proper concepts of sexuality available in the scriptures. The world is flaunting its version of sexuality and the church is keeping quiet because of embarrassment.

It is past time for Christians to counteract the wrong teaching the world is feeding us, with a healthy biblical understanding of God's plan for sexuality. It is past time for the church to speak out, not just about what is wrong sexually, but what is right and good. In the past, because of our reluctance, we have left ourselves in the position of reacting (usually badly) to any situation involving church members who have "gotten in trouble" with sex. Instead of teaching correct Biblical concepts, we have allowed our people to listen to the world's view. We are then surprised and indignant when they act on the things they have been taught concerning sex, which is the worldly view.

I strongly urge all individual Christians and families to study God's plan for sexuality. I urge our church leaders to support our families by teaching God's view of sexuality. Our families need to know that God has given us a beautiful gift in sexuality but it is given only to be enjoyed within the confines of a marriage relationship. Outside of marriage, involvement in sexual relationships will bring great distress, hardship, worry, stress, disease and separation from God. Inside a marriage relationship, God has blessed us with a wonderful gift to be enjoyed. Let's start talking and studying to see what God has to say about his wonderful gift of sex!

# The King

**David Kneip**

No, friends, I'm not talking about Elvis this month. We're going to discuss a different king, crowned in a different country.

Have any of you ever been to an inauguration? A governor, perhaps, or a president? You may have seen it on TV. Or have you been to a foreign country which is ruled by a king or queen?

It can be amazing to us Americans the amount of hoopla which surrounds rulers. People bow down, paint portraits, chant names. We associate those actions with Hollywood celebrities or sports superstars but not with our rulers. Our rulers are supposed to be "one of us," right? Any old joe could be president in the U.S., or at least that's the way we imagine it.

And yet, the idea of a king can bring some interesting and potentially uncomfortable questions to our minds. What are the kings in our lives? What do we make a bigger deal about than anything else? How do we act when we are in power in a situation—what kind of kings are we? What do we get excited about to the point of wanting to sing, dance, and bow down?

You may have already guessed the Bible story that I'd like to remind you of this month: the Triumphal Entry. You're right, but only partly. Let's look at the Gospel of Luke, chapter 19. In this chapter, Luke actually tells *two* stories about people and their kings, but the two chapters tell us very different things about what kingship might mean.

In verses 11-27 Luke tells the story of Jesus' parable of the ten minas. While this parable sounds a lot like the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, notice one difference: in Matthew the man is going on a journey, but in Luke the man is going away to be appointed *king,* even though many people don't want that. The story proceeds in the familiar way. The servants are given money and told to put it to work. Two servants do so and reap the rewards, both for the master and, later, for themselves. The third servant, though, is frightened of the master and does not do anything with the money; when the master returns, he takes the servant's mina away and gives it to the one who has ten. Notice the last line: "But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me."

I imagine the third servant, just previously embarrassed at his poor work with his master's money, walked away glad that he had held onto his life. The master was certainly powerful, and as king he could have included that servant in the group to be killed.

How are we to read this story? Do we identify God with the man who gave the money and went to be made king? Certainly, there are connections. We do believe God is the one who gives us our daily bread, and he is indeed the King and Creator of the universe. What about Jesus? He is about to be crowned King at his crucifixion, and he will shortly show his authority by cleaning out the temple.

I believe, though, that while Luke wants us to see the connections with God in Jesus' parable, he wants to help us have a fuller (and more fully biblical, I might add) picture of who God is. He doesn't want us to see God as only or even as primarily a God of wrath, a king waiting to kill his servants. He wants to show us that God is a God of love. The way he does this is by the next story he writes.

Look at verses 28-44. Now it's time for the story of theTriumphal Entry. The people and disciples rightly praise God as Jesus moves toward Jerusalem, which in Luke is the culmination of a journey that takes ten chapters to relate! They spread their cloaks on the road and sing to God. They even call Jesus the King (verse 38).

But—and this is a *big* but—look at the kind of King Jesus is. Beginning in verse 41, Jesus weeps for Jerusalem because its inhabitants have not known that their king is coming. The people that will kill him are there along with the ones who will mock him, spit on him, flog him, and ignore him.

He will find no friend in that city but a few. And he still cries for them like a loving parent.

We know the rest of the story as well. Jesus, the King, won't just weep for the people who hate him, but he'll die for them as well. And he'll be raised for them. And he'll commission his disciples to go preach to them.

Hosea 11 tells how God has brought us up like a child of his. It also tells how we, like children often do, run away from God. But God does not give us what we deserve. No, God wonders aloud how he can give us up, and he ultimately decides that he cannot. "My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger...For I am God, and not man—the Holy One among you," (11:8-9). God's holiness here means that he will notdestroy us. He could, but he chooses not to.

What kind of King do we serve? He is powerful but ultimately loving. He is holy but desires to save everyone. He weeps over those who are lost. Let me challenge you to be like the King everyday. No matter what kind of power you have over people, whether age, relationship (younger siblings, etc.), social status, whatever, find ways to give up your power in order to love, to save, and to weep as Jesus, our King, did. Serve the King by being like him.

# A Whole Lotta' Nothing

**Kent Massey**

The man and his sign stood about 15 feet off the road. He looked a little worse for wear, but it wasn't the man who caught my attention as much as it was the message he had scrawled on the sign he was holding above his head. In an effort to solicit donations for himself, he had penned an unusual request: "All I have is a whole lotta' nothing. Can you help?"

The phrase definitely caught my attention. I drove down the highway intent on making my appointment on time, but I began to mull over the truth behind the man's words. It resonated with me because of episodes in Scripture when there was a "whole lotta' nothing" and people looked to God for help.

For instance, Philip and the disciples were watching the thousands climb the hillsides, and they were coming in droves. So many people, in fact, that it defied belief. The disciples stood there staring and trying to comprehend this moving mass of humanity when Jesus broke in with a question. "Where are we going to buy bread for these people to eat?" Philip quickly did the math and said, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite." Or in other words, "All we have is a whole lotta' nothing.

Then there was a time when a wedding party in Cana hit a crisis moment. Lots of friends and neighbors came to celebrate this happy occasion. But a wet blanket was about to be thrown on the party because the wine kegs were dry. Everybody knew that you couldn't have a wedding without wine. Jesus, after a plea from his mother, looked over and spied six stone water jars. And just like the wine kegs, the jars were empty. And it seemed that there was nothing but a "whole lotta' nothing."

The disciples were empty and hurting. Shortly after the death of Jesus, they seemed lost and lonely and unsure of where to go or what to do next. Peter decided to go back and do what he knew best..."I'm going fishing." The other disciples joined him and they went into a boat and stayed out all night long fishing. Yet, all that their nets caught on that night was "a whole lotta' nothing."

Interesting how the place where Jesus starts to work miracles in our lives is at our emptiness. Ever since creation, when he began everything with nothing, that's been his starting point. It seems as if he works his most powerful miracles at a time when all that is left is "a whole lotta' nothing," and his hand is triggered by our nothingness. There seems to be a biblical pattern for how God takes our "whole lotta' nothing" and makes it his abundance.

First, he reduces or resources. He takes away the things that we would lean on instead of depending totally on him. Gideon started with thirty two thousand men to take on the Midianites, but God told him he had too many men! The number went down to ten thousand and again God told Gideon there were still too many men. Then after whittling down to three hundred men, Godsaid, "Okay, now we are ready to go to battle." God had to pare down Gideon's resources so he would totally depend on him for the victory.

Second, God magnifies our need. He makes us come face to face with the difficult circumstances and our total inability to provide for ourselves. The people were hungry, the wedding needed wine and the disciples needed some fish. And there was nothing any of them could do to meet their needs themselves.

Third, someone trusts God with what little they have. It may not be much, but it doesn't have to be when Jesus is in control. Andrew found a young boy with five loaves and two fish. It's not much, but it's enough for Jesus. The servants took the water jars and filled them to the brim, not knowing what Jesus was going to do, but knowing somehow he would do something. The disciples followed the advice of the voice from the shore and did what the voice said to do. They threw their empty nets over the other side of the boat and caught so many fish they couldn't haul the net in!

And finally, God uses the little we have to show how great He is. Little is much in the hands of Jesus. There is a biblical equation we all need to remember here: "A whole lotta nothing" plus an all–powerful Jesus equals a certain increase. In a paradox of life, the more empty or the more "whole lotta' nothing" we have, the more God can use us and the more powerfully he can work in our lives.

How much nothing do you have? If you are like me, you could use a whole lot more!

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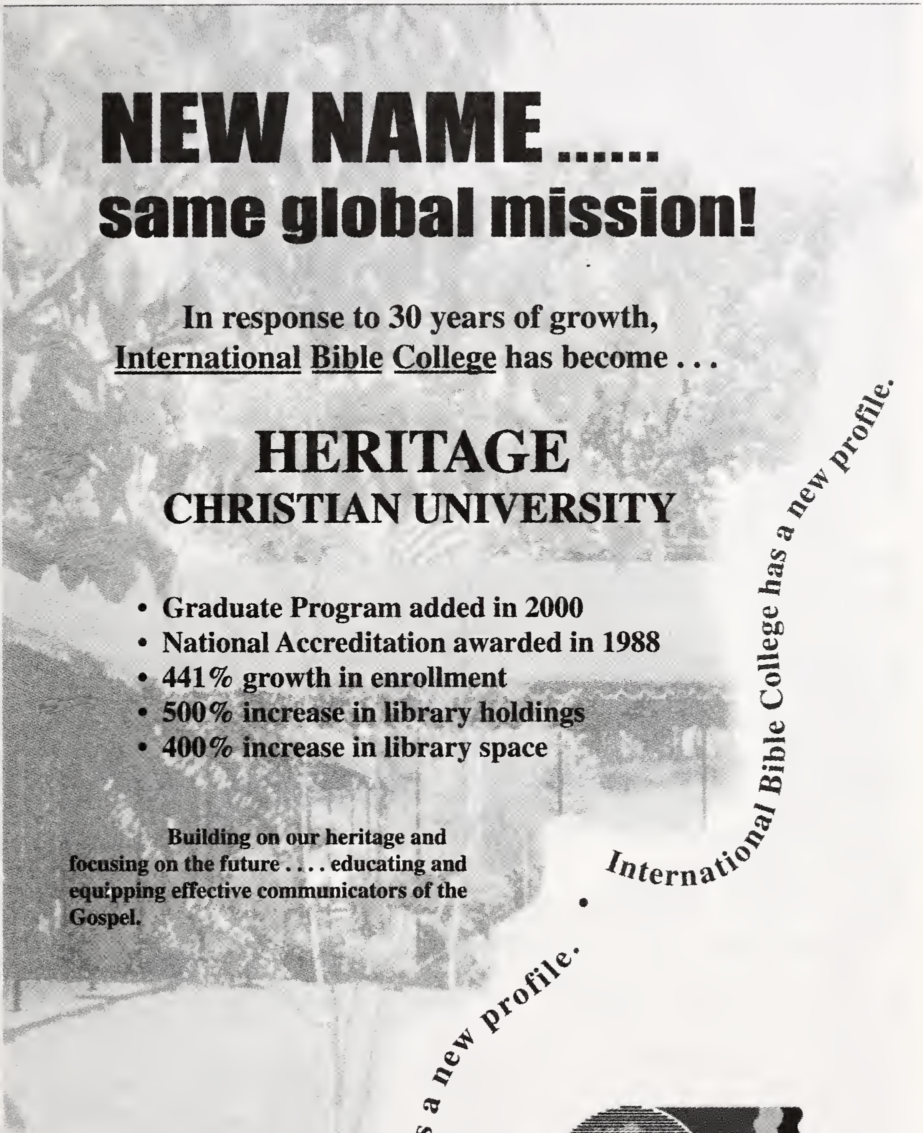
*Kent Massey serves the Providence Road Church of Christ. He can be contacted at 4900 Providence Rd., Charlotte, NC 28226.*



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# Pausing to Remember God . . .

**Chuck Jones**

> “If we fail to see God as anything less than the ultimate Power of the universe, our worship cannot and will not be complete.”

It’s easy. It really is. I’m sorry to say that I do it several times a day.

I decide I want a cup of tea and three minutes and one microwave oven later, I’ve got one. Or I pick up the phone and call my parents in Tennessee while driving my car and listening to a radio broadcast originating from St. Paul, Minnesota. Or I turn on the TV and watch a live event occurring 3,000 miles away—in full color, with stereo sound. Or I light up my entire house with the flick of a few switches. Or I hop on a plane and fly to the other side of the world in just a few hours.

None of these things are wrong. None are bad. But if I am not careful, they will result in something that is bad. If I am not careful, I will begin to feel godlike.

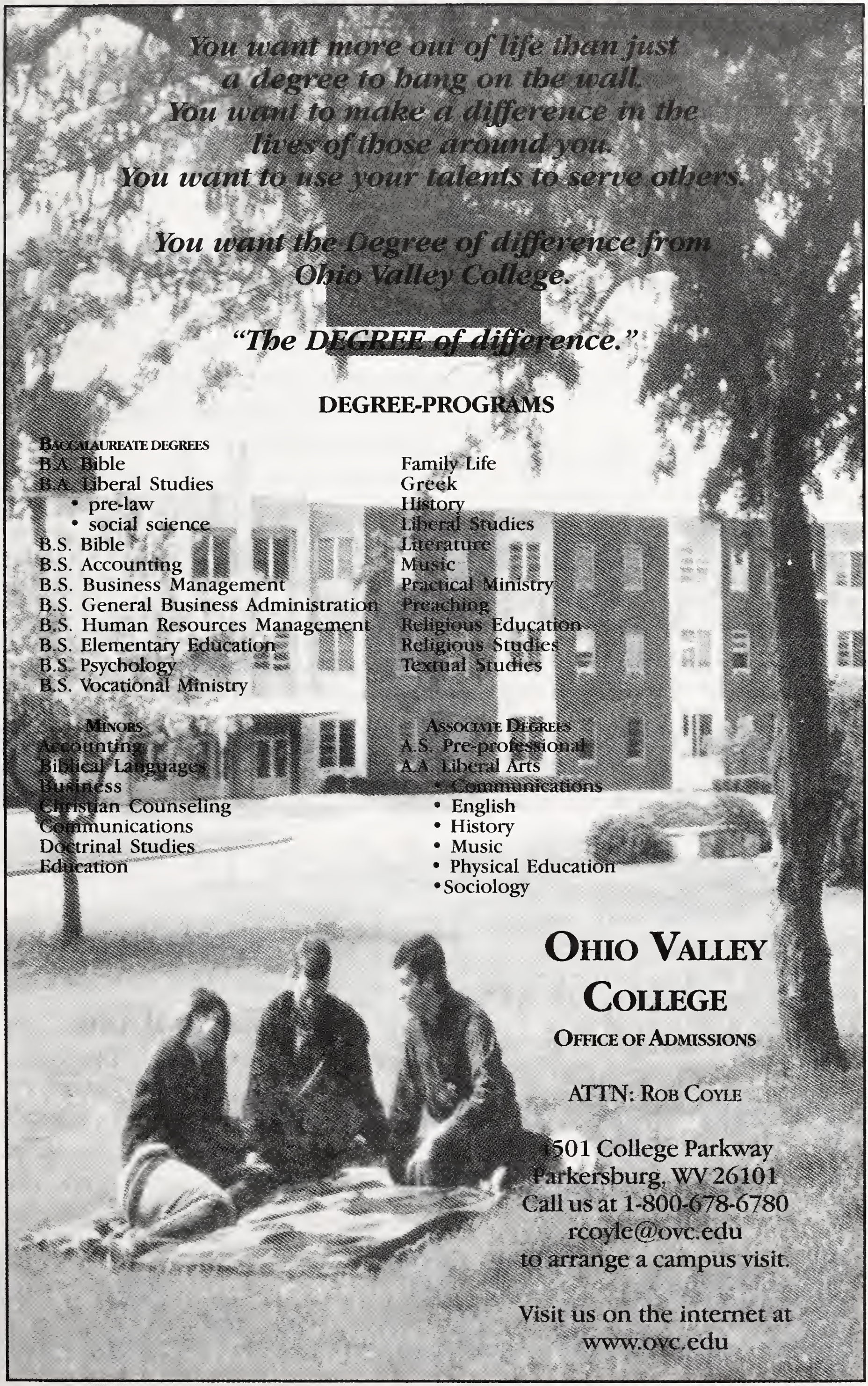
If you ever saw the movie *Titanic,* you remember Jack’s now famous line, “I’m the king of the world!” God has blessed us with so many luxuries that sometimes we can feel as if we are the kings and queens of the world…*we* have provided *ourselves* with the good things *we* enjoy. They are at our command—therefore we must be in control.

Nothing, of course, could be farther from the truth. And it can be an obstacle to worshiping God in a way that He deserves.

How often do you pause and contemplate the majesty of our Father in heaven? It’s easy to just blow through life—with all of its activities and deadlines and chaos—and never stop to ponder the simple fact that all that we see, all that we have and all we are is by God and from God.

- Every tree that sprouts green leaves in the Spring, changes them to yellow and drops them in the fall.
- Every drop of water that falls from the sky—as rain in the summer and snow in the winter.
- Every man you walk past on the street. Every woman you drive past in your car. Every child on every baseball field in every community in every state.

*(continued on page 28)*



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It isn't until we stop for a moment to realize this that we can worship Him as He deserves. If we fail to see God as anything less than the ultimate Power of the universe, our worship cannot and will not be complete.

In Psalm 102 the psalmist writes, "In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands." Stop for a minute—no, stop for fifteen minutes—clear your mind and let the wonder of a God who loves you enough to create everything you see, and a heaven you cannot even imagine, sink in. Then get ready, because worship is about to follow!

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*Chuck Jones serves the Providence Rd. Church of Christ in Charlotte, NC, as Music Minister. He can be contacted at 4900 Providence Rd., Charlotte, NC 28226.*

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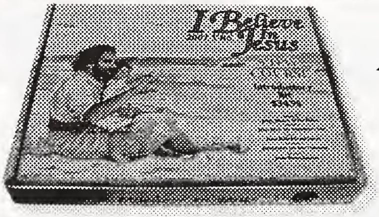

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# What Others Have Said...

"I define ego as Edging God Out."

—*Kenneth Blanchard,*
co-author of The One–Minute Manager

"Worship does not satisfy our hunger for God;
it whets our appetite."

—*Eugene H. Peterson*

"Trusting soldiers put God's reputation ahead
of their own, wait for orders before swinging swords,
and do much of their battle on their knees."

—*Randy Alcorn, "Will Work for Food,"*
Discipleship Journal, Issue 72.

"The difference between genius and stupidity
is that genius has its limits."

—*Albert Einstein*

"The hope of dying is the only thing that
keeps me alive."

—*Vance Havner*

"What we do to our children, they will do to society."

—*Pliny the Elder*

"Why do many Christians feel more guilty than
forgiven? What does feeling forgiven feel like? If the
gospel consists of grace, acceptance, and forgiveness,
why do counselors see so many Christians clients
riddled with guilt, self–hatred, and a spirit of criticism?"

—*Philip Yancey, I Was Just Wondering*

# Support Sought for Goldsboro Ministry

Charles V. Moore I preaches for the Community Church of Christ in Goldsboro, NC. Brother Moore began his ministry with the congregation in October of last year and is seeking financial support so that he can devote himself to that work full–time. He has been preaching since 1974 and has extensive experience in both North and South Carolina. For more information and a listing of references, call (919) 734-6261, or write to brother Moore at 411 S. George St., Goldsboro, NC 27530.

## BROTHERHOOD NEWS

– Mark Hudson

**KINGSTREE, SC...** *The Kingstree Church of Christ* continues to be involved in the Central Carolina School of Preaching as well as Guyana Missions. *Billy McVey*, director of the school, has announced the purchase of a house in Crabwood Creek, Guyana. The building will be used as a meeting place for the Crabwood Creek congregation, a base for an evangelistic training center, and housing for missionaries and students. The Kingstree congregation has borrowed $20,800 to fund the purchase. McVey and the Central Carolina School of Preaching will conduct a campaign to Guyana and Suriname in September. The group will be going about eight hours upriver to the village of Apoero, Suriname to establish a congregation there. Estimated cost will be about $1,200 per worker. For more information or to sign up to participate, please contact Billy McVey at (843) 354-5362, (843) 382-5824, or (83)383-5360(fax). You can also e-mail him at: bmcvey@wpmedia.com.

**ROCK HILL, SC...** The Charlotte Avenue church of Christ hosted the 3rd annual Carolina Men's Fellowship on Saturday, March 10. "Distinctive Christianity" was the theme.

**WINSTON-SALEM, NC...** The new preacher for the *Brewer Rd. Church of Christ* is Darrin Koone, most recently a member of the at Friendly Avenue church. He is a graduate of the Sunset School of Preaching and has in the past been the minister at Adams

Church of Christ in Tennessee and the Windham Church of Christ in Ohio. His wife's name is Amy and they have two children, Danisha, 14, and Derek, 12.

**FLORENCE, AL...** *International Bible College* is now *Heritage Christian University.* Although many have always thought of the former IBC as a two–year "preacher–training school," it has always been a fully accredited four–year institution. HCU also has a fifth–year graduate program that offers two masters degrees. In a letter to school supporters, President Dennis Jones wrote, "Now we are moving to a new level of service to our students and to the Lord's church."

**COLUMBIA, SC...** The *Saint Andrews Road Church of Christ* installed three additional elders in March. Darryl Crawford, David Jones, and Jerry Satterfield are now serving as shepherds with John Dennison and Calvin Richbourg. Also, the 2001 Carolina Lectures were hosted by the Saint Andrews Road congregation on April 1-5.

**DUNCAN, SC...** *Southeastern Children's Home* is offering adoption services, counseling, foster and residential care. The home recently opened its fourth cottage. The three girl's cottages and one boy's cottage can house twenty-eight children. On May 19 there will be an Open House for the new Family Services Center. The new building will house counseling rooms, social workers and administrative offices. *Robert Kimberly,* administrator, may be contacted at 155 Children's Way, Duncan, SC 29334, (864) 949-0259.

**SPARTANBURG, SC...** The 10th Annual Upstate Charity Auction to benefit *Southeastern's Children's Home* will be conducted in the fellowship hall of the *Central church of Christ* in Spartanburg beginning at 6 pm on Saturday, May 26.

# God's Answer to Worry

**Jack Exum**

The story is told of a lady who came marching up to Winston Churchill after one of his more caustic speeches and announced, "Sir, if I were your wife, I'd feed you poison!" Without missing a beat, old 'Winney' replied, "Madam, if I were your husband, I'd take it." Worry is much more than a sickness; it's a poison. It strangles the one who worries, infect all the family, moves quickly into the lives of friends, and knows no boundary by the telephone. Worry is indeed a poison and is toxic to our faith. So why do we become willing victims of this slow death?

It was stated in a recent medical journal that more than half of all patients in hospitals today have no organic disorders. The Hong Kong flu travels at a snail's pace compared to this mental virus. It's the emotional and spiritual Mad Cow disease of humans.

Never worry about what you can help or what you can't help. The things you can help, change 'em! The things you can't change and have no control over, lift them up to God. Peter says, "Casting all of your care upon the Lord, for he careth for you," (1 Peter 5:7).

Paul gives a direct command when he wrote, "Don't worry about anything whatsoever...but in everything, pray..." (Philippians 4:6). Worry is truly a futile prayer to an idol god!

"So what's the remedy?" "Give us the solution." "Don't just tell us we're sick. What kind of medicine are we talking about?"

First, you *must* realize that a cure is possible. "Oh, yeah, you can say that, but you don't have my sorry circumstances. You don't have to face the heavy health problems that I have. You haven't lost a child or two, to say nothing of the fact that I just lost my job."

So what makes you think you're the only one with any problems? We could compare notes and perhaps you have suffered more than I have, but I didn't write the text. Paul was the one who said, "Don't worry about anything." He was no raw recruit boasting over some imaginary battles fought on some paper battlefield. He had suffered the loss of all things and had limped through life with a serious "thorn in the flesh." Enemies of the cross had laid 39 stripes on his back. He knew hunger and how to bob like a cork in the sea in a sea disaster. He was acquainted with snakes, both the kind that crawled on the ground and those who stood on two feet! He spoke of as a graduate student in the school of persecution. He wrote his letter to the church in Philippi while in a Roman dungeon, awaiting trial before a bloody despot, and would soon be sacrificed as a rebel with a cause.

Pick your windows. One overlooks a sorry pig sty. The mud, the filth, the stench all too common in the scene. Add the heavy clouds, the lightning, the thunder and you've got the idea. The other window opens out onto a beautiful valley. The birds sing, the flowers sparkle with dew and everything in the valley speaks of peace and harmony. Which one do you pick?

God's answer is too simple for us. We need some PHD work here. We think in terms of modern medicine, pills in a bottle, or the shrink at the nearest corner. The supreme remedy for all your worry is *pray.* But James says you have to believe when you pray, doubting nothing (James 1:5-8). That which breaks the heart should break the silence, and that which bends the life should bend the knee.

**"That which breaks the heart should break the silence, and that which bends the life should bend the knee."**

Put a time limit on it. Get alone, get on your knees and challenge God. "God, I will not get up until you take this burden from my heart!" God cannot lie. God hears and answers prayer. He will not leave the heavy load on your back, but will gladly lift it and take it to himself.

"When will he do that?" you cry. Just the very moment you offer it to him. He will not take the burdens from you that you refuse to give up. Too simple!

So take this test; answer these simple questions:

Are you a believer? Are you in Christ? Has God removed your sin and blessed you with a renewed relationship with him? If your answer to these questions is "yes," then you qualify.

Let this simple solution be your daily practice. Start now!

---

*Jack Exum is one of the most respected preachers and authors among us. He can be contacted at RR 4 Box 215, Lake City, FL 32024.*

# Doing as Jesus Does

**Peter Rode**

What would you say is the most important quality of a Christian? Integrity? Hard work? Commitment? Character? Strong morals? Compassion? Single–mindedness? Courage? Each of these character traits, without a doubt, is desirable—even essential—in the Christian life, but I think the most indispensable quality for a Christian is the awareness of one's utter dependence upon God.

Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing," (John 15:5). Paul noted, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength," (Philippians 4:13), and James wrote, "…you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will love and do this or that," (James 4:15). However, most of us don't put these principles into action. We formulate our own plans and goals and pursue them with tremendous energy. Perhaps we might sometimes ask the Lord to guide our plans, but usually we first determine for ourselves what our plans should be before asking God to bless them. That's wrong. The Lord wants to be an integral part of our lives, not an afterthought.

As followers of Jesus we must be examples of what it means for Him to be involved in every part of our lives. We often hear of the importance of being "Christ–like," but perhaps we need to speak and think more in terms of the "Christ–life." There is a crucial difference. When we try to be Christ-like, we often try to live up to our perceptions (and perceptions can sometimes be flawed) of what Jesus was like and what he would do in certain situations. To exhibit "Christ life," however, is to let the truths of Scripture become real in our lives and to let Christ live through us. As Paul put it in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." This means that he is actually indwelling me and he can empower me to do things I cannot do myself. Perhaps, like me, you have tried to live as "Christ–like" as possible, and failed. You remain plagued by the same struggles, no matter how many times you ask the Lord to help you. You feel defeated, demoralized and disillusioned. I believe the problem is that we've been trying to use our own power instead of his.

The Lord's desire is not merely to *help* us. Even more, he wants to live his life *through* us. God told Paul, "…My strength is made perfect in weakness," (2 Corinthians 12:9). He also wants us to experience firsthand the truth of "Christ in you, the hope of glory," (Colossians1:27). What we need to do is to learn that "in Him we live and move and have our being," (Acts 17:28) We need to understand that we cannot live the Christian life our way, in our own strength. God wants us to allow Him to live his life in and through us.

Although I have come to understand and appreciate this intellectually, I still struggle to put this into practice daily. In my case, the spirit is willing but the flesh, frequently, is too strong! At these times I need to remind myself of Romans 6:11, "Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

What about you? Are you increasingly able to exhibit the "Christ life" in your everyday thoughts,words and actions? Someone once wrote, "I would rather see a sermon than hear one any day." The greatest sermon of all is a person fully yielded to Jesus Christ so that his life is what people see. As John the Baptist said, "He must become greater, I must become less," (John 3:30).

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# CAROLINA christian

"Amen!
Praise and glory
and wisdom and
thanks and honor
and power and
strength
be to our God for
ever and ever.
Amen!"

(Rev. 7:12)

# CAROLINA christian

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# The Seeking God

## (Luke 15)

**Dennis Conner**

Just why are we here? What is our purpose as the people of God? There is nothing more tragic than a church that has forgotten the answer to these questions. In Luke 15, as Jesus responds to the critics of His ministry, we find the answers to these questions.

As Luke 15 opens, we find Jesus in familiar surroundings—hobnobbing with the sinful rejects of polite, respectable society. Luke says that He was surrounded by tax–collectors and sinners who had come to hear Him, as well they should. The tax-gatherers, familiar characters in Luke, were a scandalous lot. They were loathed by their countrymen because they sold their souls to buy Roman tax-gathering privileges. They were a greedy, unscrupulous, dishonest lot. So much so that synagogues would not accept their alms and their testimony would not even be accepted in a Jewish court of law. Jesus' willing association with such people raised the critical ire of the Pharisees, who piously and self–righteously murmured among themselves, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." Indeed, what was Jesus doing associating with people like this?

The Lord answered His critics with a series of three stories that have been called "the heart of the Third Gospel." These stories challenge the conception of God that was dominant among the religious establishment of Jesus' day: that of a God who was narrow and judgmental. In these stories Jesus challenges and redefines that popular notion of God, in the process revealing the true heart of the Father. The stories share a common theme: *God loves sinners and rejoices when they are found.*

That truth not only explained why Jesus was associating with sinners (explained His ministry), but also helps us to answer the two questions raised earlier.

### The Sheep and Coin

The first two parables begin on the note of loss. A shepherd lost one of his sheep and immediately began to search for it, even though there were still 99 safely in the fold. What would one sheep matter? The woman lost one of her ten silver coins and began a thorough cleaning of her house in an attempt to find it. We can just imagine that every piece of furniture was moved, every nook and cranny of the home examined. He searched because he cared much for his sheep. She searched because the coin was of such great value to her. Both pour all their energy into the task. Both searched relentlessly until that which was lost was found. Then, do not miss the emphasis on the joy of finding that which had been lost.

These first two stories tell us about God's—about Jesus'—*compassion* for the lost and the *value* He places on each soul. Contrary to the popular notion of a God who delighted in judgment and condemnation, these stories speak of God's care for the lost and heaven's joy when the lost has been found!

"... the primary point to be noticed is that the emphasis in these stories is not on lostness, but *foundness*."

### The Rebellious Son

The third story, the universally popular story of the rebellious boy, powerfully challenges the common notion of God in Jesus' day. After the son left with his demanded inheritance and then squandered it, he found himself in the very depths of despair and degradation: a Jewish boy not only working by slopping pigs, but sharing table fellowship with them! It was then that he came to his senses and determined to return home, properly humbled and contrite.

The father, in the meantime, patiently waits. One can imagine the father, diligently and vigilantly, scanning the horizon every day in the hope that his boy might come home. Finally, one day, he sees a form in the distance, and there was something in that form that he recognized. It was his boy! Immediately the old man ran out to meet his prodigal son, throwing his arms around the dishonorable boy and kissing him ceaselessly. What Luke doesn't tell us, but what would have been understood by Jesus' audience, is that such behavior by a Jewish father was completely unacceptable in that society. No self–respecting father would behave in such a way toward a son who had treated him with such disrespect. Yet, this father has no qualms about making a spectacle of himself.

Of course, the father in the story is God and the rebellious boy is the sinner (that is, *us*). The truth about God is that *He runs meet the sinner where he is!* God is willing to make a spectacle of Himself in His love for the lost. And again, the note of joy and celebration is central, "My son was lost, and is found again!"

### The Message

As Jesus responded to His critics, the primary point to be noticed is that the emphasis in these stories is not on lostness, but *foundness.* In each story, there is rejoicing when that which was lost has been *found.* Jesus' message to His critics is that, "The reason I associate with these people is that God is looking for them. They are lost, and He will not rest until they are found. God is a seeking God." Indeed, Jesus would later confirm that this was the very reason for His ministry: "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost," (Luke 19:10). That's the way God is, that's the way Jesus is, and that's the way His people must be.

### The Real Scandal

There was another group present that day that was more scandalous than the tax-collectors and sinners...the Pharisees. Their scandal was that they thought they knew God, when in fact they didn't understand Him at all! Had they, the would not have been critical of the ministry of Jesus. Their scandal was that they had forgotten their reason for being.

It is clear that in the story of the rebellious son the elder brother represented the scribes and Pharisees and their refusal to accept the notion that God's love is for everybody. The elder brother today stands as a tragic indictment of many modern churches. Have we become so exclusive, so prideful, so uncaring, that the lost mean nothing to us? Have we become so preoccupied with keeping ourselves clean and undefiled, or with maintaining our own traditions, that we have lost sight of the heart of God? So secure in our "faithfulness" that we have lost our compassion for the sinner?

So, why are we here? What is our purpose as the people of God? How would you answer those questions now?

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*Associate Editorial:*

# The Church and Morality:

## *The Spiritual Transformation of Sin (12)*

**Ron Newberry**

"Pride, of course, is not the only sin," writes Wells in *Losing Our Virtue,* "but it is at the heart of sin." Why? Pride is the ultimate religious devotion to our own interests. It makes our own tiny, petty concerns the ultimate pursuit of life. Out self interests are served with the vigor and devotion that should only be reserved for God. Pride, Wells notes, elevates our judgments and our righteousness to divine heights. There should be no surprise then that in a culture that has jettisoned standards for decency and moral absolutes has fallen neck deep into the sin of pride.

We should keep in mind that in the Bible all sin and pride in particular is always understood in relation to God. Our culture tends to view sin in relation to self. That is, while we denounce sin in others how often is our hatred for sin linked to the fact that God hates it? Sin is not just a crime against the state, like breaking the law against reckless driving or embezzlement in which case a fine or perhaps jail time squares a debt with society. In deed, sin may be an infraction against moral laws, but it is also an offence against God and that debt cannot ever be repaid by the offender. In short, man does not just commit acts that are deemed sin; *he is a sinner.*

Sin is about reordering the world around ones own wants and desires. In so doing, man becomes an idolater. Man's appetites and demands take center stage and God's agenda is pushed to the periphery.

This increased hunger for self-fulfilling attitudes and behaviors has left our culture malnourished even though there is a sense of being filled. A kind of "God hunger" exists even though it goes largely unnoticed or at least unrecognized for what it is.

This portal of insight into the world gives the church perhaps its best opportunity to reach the world with the gospel. The spiritual yearning of man and the inability to satisfy that hunger in a world that is devoid of meaning has cracked the door of opportunity.

If we are to move through the door of opportunity, we must reclaim the meaning of sin. As I discussed in an earlier article, we have declared that the major problem in our culture is that of a lack of self-esteem. Criminals are analyzed and declared incompetent because they think so poorly of themselves. The exact opposite is most often the case. The problem is we think too highly of ourselves. If sin is really only about self-esteem, then what's the remedy for sin? It is merely the reversal of the poor self-image. We in turn take the role of God since we become the source of our own salvation. Rather than proclaiming automated messages catering to the cultural belief that self-esteem is the culprit, we must regain the upper hand by declaring war on sin.

That is the challenge for the church today if we expect to reach the lost. On closer inspection the reclaiming of the high ground regarding sin is not just about pointing accusatory fingers at the murders, the rapists, the abortionists, etc., of our day. The challenge involves examining our own hearts in the church and dealing with the sin we find there as well. In this final installment of articles based on interaction with David Wells' book *Losing Our Virtue,* I leave you with a final question based on the challenge noted above: *Are we up to the challenge or have we too lost our virtue?*

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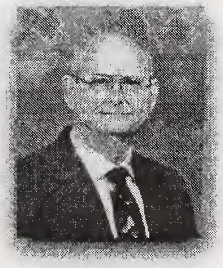

*Hollis Maynard*

# School Prayer

**Dennis Conner**

It is a common complaint, and a popular perception, that our country has not been the same since prayer was removed from public schools. For the sake of accuracy, kids can still pray in school. For instance, on many school campuses around the country the Fellowship of Christian Athletes has groups meeting after school hours. There are also Bible clubs of all kinds that meet on school property, but are not a part of the school curriculum. At all of these meetings prayer goes on unhindered. And no one, not even the Supreme Court, can prohibit a student from praying silently to oneself during school hours. In fact, I suspect that's practice a lot of kids engage in regularly before a test! What is prohibited is a student being compelled to pray contrary to one's belief system.

To be sure, the banning of public prayer in the classroom corresponds with a shift toward secularism in our society and educational system. Whether the banning of prayer was a cause, or merely a symptom, of that shift is still debatable. While it is popular to attribute the moral decline of our nation to the lack of prayer in our schools, I believe there is another dynamic at work here that has gone largely unnoted. More troubling than the lack of prayer in public schools is the lack of prayer in Christian homes! Beyond the traditional "saying the blessing" at meal time, my experience over the years has led to the suspicion that there is very little family prayer going on in Christian families. Husbands and wives seldom pray together. Parents seldom pray with their children (here I am not thinking of the practice of bedtime prayers taught to small children, but prayer as an integral part of family life throughout the growing

> *"More troubling than the lack of prayer in public schools is the lack of prayer in Christian homes."*

up years). Prayer is more of an afterthought in many families, rather than a vital part of family life and faith.

There has arisen a twisted irony in which a lack of prayer in secular society (what else should we expect from the world?) is met with moral outrage and indignation, while the general lack of vital and persistent prayer in Christian homes (the one place we certainly should expect it) is met with an apathetic shrug. Perhaps the reason is that it is far easier for us to criticize others rather than ourselves; to call attention to the failings of others rather than our own failings.

Can you imagine the difference it could make in the church and in the world if we would devote as much energy and concern to restoring prayer to our homes as we do to seeing it restored to our schools? There may not be a lot that we can do as individuals to change the moral and spiritual fabric of our nation, but there is a lot that we can do through encouraging prayer in our homes to strengthen the moral and spiritual fabric of our families. But then again, by taking seriously the latter, we may well have more influence on the former. After all, a little leaven leavens the whole lump!

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# Do Not Hinder The Children...

**Russ Jurek**

There was once an occasion were parents brought their children to see Jesus, to have him place his hands on them and pray for them. The disciples, believing Jesus didn't have time for children, rebuked those who brought the children. It's almost as if they were saying "Only adults are important to God, so the children have to wait until they grow up before God has time for them." Jesus cleared up this misconception right away by saying, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matthew 19:14).

> "As we teach them about Jesus, they are looking for him in us."

I got to thinking about this passage and began wondering how often we disciples of Jesus today do the same thing his disciples did back then. How often do we hinder the children from seeing Jesus? Intellectually, we know Jesus loves the little children so we don't stand up and rebuke the parents and hold back the children. In fact, we have Bible classes, VBS and even "cradle Roll" classes for our infants. We sing "Jesus Loves The Little Children" as we teach the children about Jesus and his love for them. But while doing all this, do we hinder the children from seeing Jesus in more subtle ways?

When they see us worship in prayer and song, do they see Jesus or are they hindered? When they hear us talking about everything but godly things, do they see Jesus or are they hindered? When they see where we spend our time and money, do they see Jesus or are they hindered? When they see and hear the way we treat one another, do they see Jesus or are they hindered?

It is so easy to get caught up in our adult world and not realize that children are absorbing all they see and hear. As we teach them about Jesus, they are looking for him in us. We have the opportunity to help them or hinder them from seeing Jesus by the way we live every day. It is so important for us to realize that if children aren't allowed to see Jesus when they are young, they won't look for him when they are grown up! What would Jesus say today to you and me, his disciples, about the little children?

# Getting What We Deserve

**David Kneip**

*Scene 1:* A young man and a young lady are dating. They are both good, Christian people, and they have done a good job at preserving the purity of their relationship, both physically and emotionally. One of the things that attracts the young man to the young lady is her commitment to prayer and her wonderful compassion, but the young lady in her humility doesn't see the good things about herself. She puts the young man on a pedestal and tells him repeatedly, "I don't deserve you."

*Scene 2:* A married couple in their 30's. The wife is very intelligent and is working toward a Ph.D. and a college teaching position. The husband, a part-time preacher and family therapist, has always been athletic, but in recent years he has developed a chronic medical condition that has begun to deteriorate his muscles. After a doctor's appointment in which he's told that he might only have 5 years of functional life left, he begins to wonder what he now brings to the table in his marriage. He tells his wife, "I don't deserve you."

Have you ever felt that way? Like someone is doing something for you or putting up with you when you don't deserve it? That feeling can take a variety of forms, and it can arise from a variety of places. Whether you lack self-esteem like the young lady in the first story or have too much self-confidence like the guy in the second, you can feel like you don't deserve something someone else gives you. You might experience this with your parents—lavish love coming down even though you treat them like dirt. Or, it might be with a significant other. You might have had experiences with church folks who have taken you under their wing, either in comfort or possibly even rebuke, and later on you look back and wonder at the action.

**"Keep your heart pure and your motives sound, and know, then, that you're doing God's work..."**

Do you notice that the common thread in all of these possibilities is *relationship?* I think that it takes a decent level of relationship with someone to feel like you don't deserve something about that relationship. The relationship might be based on quality time, on blood lines, or even just on some profound actions, but the relationship must be there. I think the reason is that in a relationship we have expectations—of ourselves, of the other person, of the normal working of the relationship—and when we feel that either we aren't doing our part, or that the other is doing too much, we're getting something we don't deserve.

There is one relationship, though, in which we need to hold on to that sense of our own undeserving-ness, and that's our relationship with God. Listen to these words from Deuteronomy, and picture in your mind Jesus hanging on the cross, asking God to forgive his executioners because they didn't know what they were doing: "The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous that other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands" (Deuteronomy 7:7-9).

It was important for Moses to remind the Israelites that even though they had won many battles on their way to the banks of the Jordan and would win more within the promised land, God did not choose them for that reason. Rather, he chose them because he loved them. And that's the way it is with us. We need to remember that our God is the faithful God, that he gives us everything, salvation now and forever, not because of anything we've done but because he loves us. That's not to say that we are worthless creatures; on the contrary, we are God's children and have been made in his image.

And so, in one sense we "deserve" nothing that God gives us. We don't even deserve each other. In another sense, though, we do "deserve" everything, because God has made us worthy to receive his entire kingdom through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Romans 5:8: "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." We are worthy, both to give love and to receive it. God has taken "deserving-ness" off the table by *choosing* us to be his people.

And that's how we can be with others. That everyone is worthy to receive our love and service liberates us to lavish our love on everyone, not just on the pretty people or the ones we like. We choose the whole world. That's how God did it, and it's how we can, too. It may be that someone will say that they don't deserve what you give them. That's fine. Keep your heart pure and your motives sound, and know, then, that you're doing God's work in their world.

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# Urgent Need!

# Don't Worry, Be Prayerful . . . .

**Ron Newberry**

"Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life," (Philippians 4:6-7, *The Message)*.

In this text, written some 30 years after Jesus' ministry, Paul simply expands on Jesus' earlier teaching about prayer. The Lord had told the disciples that if they do not doubt God, they can do everything they need to do for the sake of the kingdom. Granted, He uses hyperbole to make the point by telling them that they could tell a mountain to jump into the lake and it would comply. But don't miss the point. "Absolutely everything, ranging from small to large, as you make it a part of your believing prayer, gets included as you lay hold of God," (Matthew 21:22, *The Message)*. Or as the NIV renders it, "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

Do we really believe these promises? If so, do we just believe them with our heads, or do we really believe them in our hearts? Do we believe them enough to practice them? Do we believe them enough to be bold in our prayers, not afraid to ask for what we believe we need that is compatible with the will of God?

Stop being anxious, Paul says. Pray and petition God. You will receive a sense of wholeness. Everything will come together for good. Do we believe that? Do we boldly rely on that promise? If so, then why do anxiety and worry grind down so many of us? Why don't we claim that promise for ourselves so that we can function better in the work of the kingdom of God? Why do we not embrace that promise for our church? Why don't we go to the throne of God with courage to lay our petitions at his feet? After all, God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power (2 Timothy 1:7).

There's a story of a ship that was being battered by a terrible storm. The passengers were terrified. There was screaming and weeping from everyone in the dining hall where they had gathered, except from one small boy who sat calmly on the floor. A passenger asked the boy, "Aren't you afraid young man? We could all die out here!" The boy smiled and said, "No ma'am. I'm not afraid. My dad is the captain."

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life. None of us are exempt from the hurricanes that wreck our lives every day. We just have the privilege of knowing that the captain is our Father.

The foundation of our prayer life is faith. We either pray with and in faith, or we are simply mouthing words. Praying in faith is not a matter of being worthy enough to pray, or good enough to pray. If that were the case, none of us would qualify! We pray because God is worthy and good.

Don't pray puny prayers. Nothing is too hard for God to do! Pray for what you need. God may grant just what you ask. However, He might say "no" to your request and follow it with, "I really want to give you something better than what you asked for." Sometimes He may say, "That's not good for you, so I won't give it to you. But I've got something here you're going to love that will take its place." At other times He might say, "Well, that's alright for you to have, but the timing just isn't right. Let's wait until you're ready."

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# Before the Master's Feet

**Dan Waller**

"Worship services." How easily it slips off our lips, but do we really understand these two very similar (if not identical) terms? Have you ever asked what the Bible actually has to say about our "worship services?" What is this idea of worship?

Maybe the best place to start is in a passage that never mentions the terms, but bubbles over with the idea. Jesus said the greatest commandment was to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength," (Matthew 22:37-40). Loving God with our all is certainly an aspect of worship and service to Him. Bowing before Him (worship) and living to His glory (service) is the essence of the Christian life. Whether in an auditorium filled with brothers and sisters in Christ, or on the job on Monday morning, it all belongs, in some sense, within the idea of worship service.

It is amazing that throughout the law of Moses great detail was give prescribing precisely the kind of ceremonies and practices to be offered to God as worship. He made great demands on His people and tremendous prices were paid for failure tow worship as God prescribed. You would expect the same sort of prescriptions to be found in the New Testament. Take a moment and get our your concordance and look for the phrase "worship service" and then search each term separately. What's so amazing is not what you find, but what you don't find.

Only on one occasion do we find the word "worship" specifically associated with the assembly of God's people on the first day of the week. In 1 Corinthians 14:25 the unbeliever who visits the church falls on his face and worships God saying, "God is really among you." The first time someone shared this observation with me I immediately thought of Matthew 18, where scripture promises the Lord's presence when two or three are gathered together in His name. To my surprise the assembly for Sunday worship is not at all in the context. The very foundations of my faith were shaken, because much of my effort to please God was wrapped up in going through the motions in the assembly each Sunday. There is a tremendous lesson here!

The term "worship" simply means "to bow down before." We bow down before God corporately on Sundays, and individually through the week as we live before Him reverently. The term "worship service" is manmade. Now, before you draw any conclusions about the essence of this tremendous lesson, take a moment to think it through.

### When We Gather on Sunday

The *purpose* of our assemblies hasn't changed all that much since the days of Moses. We gather to make sacrifices and offerings. Take a look at Hebrews 12:18-29 and discover some similarities and differences. It is extremely biblical that celebration should be a major part of our assemblies. We bow before God in thanksgiving for the blessings He gives each day through the blood of Jesus. We offer to Him songs of praise as the fruit of our lips (Hebrews 13:15). We offer up prayers and even give material offerings of the wealth God has blessed us with. We celebrate our deliverance from bondage through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, knowing that we no longer live in fear of death, knowing that our sins have been forgiven and we have justification and redemption through the blood of the Lamb. Celebration is an act of reverence before God in appreciation for all His spiritual and material blessings. This is what we do on Sunday.

### Monday Through Saturday

Scripture overflows with the idea that our worship in the assembly is only as acceptable as our service to God and our fellow man during the week. The greatest way to demonstrate our love for God is to abide by what Jesus called the second greatest commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself," (Matthew 22:37-40). We cannot foster poor relationships with people and have a great relationship with God.

The greatest passage concerning our daily service and worship to God is found in Luke 4. There Jesus responds to Satan's temptation with these words, "Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only." The question we face and answer with each passing day is that of whether we are going to serve God with our lives, or shall we worship the world?

There are several essential purposes for God's people, and worship is right there at the top of the list. So be sure to get the enthusiasm flowing this Sunday and go prepared to make great offerings to God in appreciation for all He has done for you. And be sure to serve Him by living with the character of Jesus, bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

When you put those two together, you will be living by the greatest commandment in the entire Bible: *"Jesus replied, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments.'"*

This is worship service.

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# Living By Faith

**Peter Rode**

*"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death,"* (Proverbs 14:12.

There are *many* ways that seem right to us. These ways may have been determined by tradition, doctrine, or culture. Yet, there is way that is right and that is the way that follows Christ steadfastly in moment–by–moment obedience.

Our obedience to God is greatly affected, however, when we put great trust in our own reasoning abilities. We examine and weigh up the facts, draw our conclusions, and then often make decisions based primarily upon what we think is the right way to go. There's a grave danger, though, in following what often appears to be right. It's true that God gave us minds to use, but that means He also gives us knowledge and wisdom to question, and then determine whether we are being led by Him or by something else. Minds led by what seems to be right are often blinded by barriers that restrict us, but would not restrict God.

Living by faith means living by "more than meets the eye." If we are to truly experience the magnificence of God, we must learn to stop trusting our eyes and simply trust the Maker of our eyes. He gave us eyes to see, but not so that we would be led by what we see. He gave us minds to use, but not so that we would be led by what we think. Results based living will probably allow us to feel comfortable in life, but it will not allow us to experience the wonders of God, and what He offers is truly more than meets the eye.

As our eyes become fixed on wants from this life, as they become increasingly familiar, we can easily find ourselves trusting only in that which is reasonable and comprehensible. Claiming to be people of faith does not make faith real. Engaging in religious activities does not in itself instill true belief; practiced religion does. Our dreams and ambitions have few differences from the desires of those still in the world. We have similar problems and we persist in solving problems the same way as those who don't know God.

We have got to stop looking to the world around us as an example of how to live life. Too much of our living is influenced by what we want, what looks good or what, we think, brings us pleasure. We must instead embrace a higher standard of living through the teachings of Christ (Ephesians 4:1). We cannot go on looking for answers as the rest of the world does and expect God to bless us. He has established a way that is right and it leads to life, not death. God offers more than meets the eye in the form of His grace that works behind the scenes (Ephesians 3:16, 21), His love that sustains us, and His working out everything in our lives while keeping our best interests at heart (Romans 8:28).

The question is: "Are you willing to walk by faith and not by sight?"

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*Peter Rode serves the Friendly Ave. church in Greensboro, NC. He can be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.*

# Two Types of Sexual Relationships

**Paul Jarrett**

During a recent Bible study in which we were discussing the familiar story of David and Bathsheba, a question was raised by one of the students regarding whether there was any significance to the description of Bathsheba that is recorded in II Samuel 11:2. In this text we are simply told, “she was very *beautiful* in appearance”.

> *“Earlier he had been driven by his own desires, but now he is wanting to minister to her need.”*

In responding to this question, I made reference to the fact that this description mirrored what was said about the way men had come to view women in the course of events leading up to the flood. We are told, “that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were *beautiful*; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose” (Genesis 6:2). This basis of selecting wives did not please God, and seems to have precipitated the wicked conditions which led to His decision to destroy the earth with water.

I concluded that the description of Bathsheba was significant in that it reflected David’s approach to the sexual relationship which he entered into with Bathsheba. It was a relationship based solely on David’s physical attraction to her. It was about his lust for this *beautiful* woman. David was not concerned about her as a person. He was only interested in her physical appearance. She was an object to be desired, not a person to be respected. David knew nothing about her as a person—her feelings and her needs were of no interest to him. He only wanted her body.

If what I have just described sounds familiar to you, it should. David’s approach to his initial sexual encounter with Bathsheba is reflective of the way the sexual relationship is far too often approached in our society. When the basis for a sexual relationship is purely physical, why should it surprise us when it fades away. Isn’t that the very nature of the physical realm? “The grass withers, and the flower falls off” (I Peter 1:24ff).

I did not fully appreciate the significance of this account of David’s initial sexual relationship with Bathsheba until I read the account of their second sexual encounter which is recorded in 2 Samuel 12:24. It occurs after the death of the child that had been conceived as a result of their initial encounter. It is described like this:

"Then David *comforted* his wife Bathsheba, and went into her and lay with her; and she gave birth to a son, and he named him Solomon. Now the Lord loved him and sent word through Nathan the prophet, and he named him Jedidiah for the Lord's sake."

Do you see how different this sexual encounter is than the first one? In the first one, David is only interested in satisfying his own lusts that have been stirred by Bathsheba's physical appearance. However, in this second encounter he is motivated by a desire to *comfort* her. Before, he had exhibited no concern for her feelings as a person, but now he is interested in what she is feeling as a person. Earlier he had been driven by his own desires, but now he is wanting to minister to her need.

This second encounter mirrors the description of the sexual relationship which Paul described when he wrote: "Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does" (I Corinthians 7:4,5 NKJV). David's second sexual encounter with Bathsheba was about love, not lust, and "Love does no wrong" (Romans 13:10f).

It should not surprise us that the fruit of David's initial encounter met with disaster, but it is said of the fruit of this second encounter, "the Lord loved him." The fate of these two children is, I believe, symbolic of the different outcome of these two approaches to the sexual relationship. When sex is only about physical attraction, with no concern for the person we have objectified, the end result will be tragic. However, when the sexual relationship is rooted in commitment and genuine concern for our spouse, the fruit that results will be loved by the Lord.

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*Paul Jarrett preaches for the Naples Church of Christ in Naples, FL. He is also editor of* ***A Christian Review.***

# Character

**Jack Exum**

Shortly after World War One the basic view of success seemed to shift from the character ethic to what might be called the personality ethic. The view was that image is more important than substance. Since then hundreds of books have been written telling how this technique or means, or that method can bring you happiness and success. How to influence people, how to get rich without really trying, how to be successful in your marriage, how to succeed in business. Over time concern for character gave way to personality and technique.

The deceitful part of the personality approach was clearly manipulative and fraudulent, using the plastic smile and glib talk to find others for the purpose of using them to get ahead. With a strong personality you can build a reputation and with the "power look" you can make your way to the top. It's the power of personal politics and many use it.

Consequently, the character ingredient was somehow pushed aside and society tended to give it a low grade as a fundamental ethic for the good life. This developed the saying, "Be careful who you step on while going up; you may need them on your way down!"

While I recognize many of the techniques and elements of the personality ethic are not only good, but also often essential in the flow of society, yet it can never take the place of genuine character. What a person *is* is so much more valuable than what a person does. We learn to *be,* then we learn to do and have.

> "The heart is that which produces personality—personality does not produce heart."

The wise king Solomon wrote, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life," (Proverbs 4:23). What is Solomon saying? That the character of the heart is that which gives true life to the personality. Jesus declared, "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that

*(continued on page 24)*

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anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart," (Matthew 5:27-28). While the act of adultery is sinful, that which creates the sin is in the heart. Trash in, trash out! The heart is the key to character. This is emphasized again in Matthew 15:19, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man unclean."

John writes about a church in Asia that carried the bold reputation that "We are rich, increased in goods, and have need of nothing." Yet Jesus, the righteous Judge, said, "You are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." The counsel was simple, "Buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich, and white raiment that you may be clothed…and anoint your eyes with eye–salve, that yo may see," (Revelation 3:14-22).

Character is like the hub of a wheel. Many a wheel carried on with some of the spokes rotted away, and some wheels made it when the rim was rusted. But *no wheel* ever carried any weight at all when the hub was broken. The heart is that which produces personality—personality does not produce heart. The hub is the heart and secures all of our relationships. The spokes extend to where our life is and the rim is the daily walk. The hub is permanent. Spokes can be replaced, but to replace the hub is to build a new wheel.

In the words of Thoreau, "For every thousand hacking at the leaves of evil, there is one striking at the root." To struggle with attitude and behavior is one thing; to change the heart is something else altogether. A new birth is needed.

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# What's That Smell?

**Kent Massey**

"What's that smell?" Vallarie asked as she opened the refrigerator door.

"It's not me," I replied with my back to her.

"No, stupid…the smell from the refrigerator."

It didn't take long for me to realize that some stuff stinks. Rotten, filthy, decaying fruit left in the bottom of the refrigerator was a potent reminder. If something doesn't pass the "sniff test" we don't eat it nor do we buy it. Marketing experts have realized the power of scent in helping them sell their products.

Joel Lloyd Bellenson and Dexster Smith are taking this knowledge to a new level. Being Internet entrepreneurs, they are determined to produce the smells you want through the wonders of technology. Their company, "DigiScents," will allow users to go to the New, download a "streaming scent" and play it back on a device called an "iSmell." This is a portable scent synthesizer—sort of a cross between a printer and a speaker—that will emit the odor that you have selected. About the size of a typical audio speaker, the "iSmell" attaches to your computer and will broadcast countless combinations of human detectable scents.

"For the church to continue to be the "aroma" of Christ, there are some odors that we need to be rid of."

This technology means that you will be able to "click and sniff" new perfume samples; watch Martha Stewart cook online and literally smell what's for dinner; click on the garden nursery web page and smell the latest hybrid rose. Marketing experts see this technology as a gold mine because they believe that once you smell it, you will buy it.

Aromas are indeed incredibly powerful. They are able to attract or repulse, entice or sicken. And

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as Christians, we give off an odor that sometimes will cause people to turn away from a life of obedience to the Lord. It is not that we are rotten or rancid, but rather a faint aroma of disobedience. It is subtle, but strong enough to cause notice.

If it smells, you don't buy it. And neither will anyone else—not even God. Scripture reminds us that God likes the smell of sweet offerings, yet His nose will turn up at sins that make a stench. Paul reminds us, "For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those being saved and among those who are perishing; to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life," (2 Corinthians 2:15-16).

We don't need an "iSmell" to know what kinds of attitudes or actions give off an offending odor:

- Little or no compassion for the downtrodden, rejected, oppressed, and less fortunate;
- Racial inequality and injustice;
- Attitudes that replace His grace with my work;
- A lack of love for one another in our congregations;
- Name calling and personal attacks in the name of "truth";
- A demand to be served, rather than a willingness to serve;
- A deficiency of mercy which leads to harsh judgments and critical words.

For the church to continue to be the "aroma" of Christ, there are some odors that we need to be rid of. Be careful how you live this week, because you may be the only Bible that people ever read. Or maybe the only Bible some will ever smell!

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*Kent Massey can be contacted at 4900 Providence Rd., Charlotte, NC 28211.*

# ..I Have Been to the Mountain

### Chuck Jones

I've often wondered—of all the things the apostles witnessed while Jesus was on the earth, which stood out in their minds more than any other? That's a tough one. They saw people raised from the dead, and others healed. They witnessed stormy waters being stilled, and Jesus (and Peter!) walking on the surface of the water. They were there when 5,000 people were fed from one young boy's lunch. They watched demons being driven out of people and into pigs. Finally, they saw Jesus ascend into heaven.

But for three apostles, I believe what they saw on a high mountain may have topped all the rest. Here's Mark's account in the ninth chapter of his gospel. "After six days, Jesus took Peter, James and John with him up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There, he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus."

Continuing later he writes, "Then, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud, 'This is my Son, whom I love, Listen to him!' Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus."

Peter, James and John had a mountaintop experience—literally and figuratively! Jesus, Moses and Elijah, together. And finally, God speaking, acknowledging Jesus as the authority, and symbolically taking the others away.

Have you ever been to the mountain? It was nothing at all like the apostles' experience, but I've been there. There have been times in worship when I have felt the presence of God and Jesus near. It happens like this. The singing is right on. We read scripture in unison. The sermon touches a chord and people respond, both in baptism and in recommitting their lives to Christ. Everyone's happy. Everyone's up. We leave with skips in our steps and can't wait to come back. Then it happens—the next week comes around and, well, it isn't what we expect, and we're disappointed.

It's common. I hear from worship leaders all over that once worship experience reaches a certain level, we expect it to be at that level all the time. When it isn't, we feel like worship has not been acceptable. It's trap, and an obstacle.

I'm convinced that God brings us together for His purposes. Each week, something happens in each of us that He wants to happen—if we are sincerely engaged in worship and not coming for ourselves. We have to remember that our emotions are by-products of our worship. Worship is for God, and Him only. Sure, it's great to feel good after heartfelt worship. We should. But our feeling good should never be the reason, nor the motivation, for our worship.

So next time you're on the mountain of worship, remember this—God made the mountains, and the valleys, and everything in between. It is all His handiwork. Let's rejoice in it all.

*Chuck Jones can be reached at 4900 Providence Rd., Charlotte, NC 28211.*

## BROTHERHOOD NEWS

– Mark Hudson

**KINGSTREE, SC...** The Regents for the *Central Carolina School of Preaching* met in April at the church of Christ in Kingstree, South Carolina. In an unanimous decision they agreed to relocate the school to the *Kingsbury Road church of Christ* facilities in Sumter, SC. *Melvin Sapp,* preacher for the Kingsbury Road congregation, will now serve as the new director for the school. Other instructors for the Central Carolina School of Preaching include *Joseph Barr, Melvin Hampton, Billy McVey and Ron Wilson.*

**CHARLOTTE, NC...** *David Chisolm,* minister for the *Sugar Creek Church of Christ* in Charlotte, has announced new dates for the dedication of their new facility. Activities will be held July 15-18 with a special singing on Saturday, July 14. For additional information call (704) 598-5331 or visit www.sccoc.org.

**RALEIGH, NC...** The *Brooks Avenue church of Christ* is hosting the annual Mid-Atlantic Evangelism Seminar, September 20-23.

# Who's Got Who?

**Stephen J. Walls-Mathis**

Have you seen the bumper sticker that's out, "Got Jesus?" It plays off of the still popular "Got Milk?" campaign. I liked it the first few times I saw it. It strikes a chord, is easy to remember and uses the world's creativity to reflect the Creator's truth.

We find Paul doing the same thing in chapter 17 of Acts as he talks to the philosophers in Athens. Quoting from Greek poets, Paul speaks of God. "For in him we live and move and have our being," and "We are his offspring." (Acts 17:28). We learn a significant lesson from this, to take the best the world has to offer, in art, in science, in history, etc., find the echoes of the Creator, and offer it to the Lord. His grace transforms these things once again into His creation.

Having said that, about the fourth or fifth time I saw the "Got Jesus?" bumper sticker I began to wonder if it was missing something. Of course there's a limit to what you can include on a bumper sticker. Who has time—or the eyesight—to read John chapter 3 or Acts chapter 2 on a car bumper? But I think one change to "Got Jesus?" would improve its message. My suggestion is to create a bumper sticker that reads "Has Jesus Got You?" (I don't think it will happen. The current bumper sticker is just too catchy.)

Here's the problem I see. "Got Jesus?" plays into the dangerous consumer mentality that affects us so deeply. It's easy for us to forget that Christianity, that our salvation in Christ, is not a commodity. Far too often we try and create our own eclectic discipleship, choosing a little from one tradition and a little from another until we have the "religion that works for me."

"Got Jesus," like our pick and choose theology, has the truth backwards. Even if I do the best I can do at all times I cannot save myself. The life of faith begins with a startling revelation: I cannot keep the law. I cannot save myself. I cannot earn my way into Heaven. I cannot have it my way. I can't *get* Jesus.

But, praise God, He has gotten me! "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him," (John 3:16-17, NIV). "God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us," (Romans 5:8, NIV).

It is God who is at work in our lives, according to his sovereign will. It is Jesus who saves us. Before you ask "Got Jesus?" you need to ask "Has Jesus Got You?"

# Ethics in Ministry

**Robert J. Young**

Ministerial ethics must be continually rethought because so much is at stake. First, much is at stake for those who preach and minister. Understanding how and why ministers act—identifying potential problems—is not as easy as one might think because humans are prone to rationalization, personalities enter power struggles, and honest self-evaluation is difficult in the fervor of life. We must admit that hard questions exist, identify them, and encourage personal reflection. Second, much is at stake for the church. Only with difficulty and much struggle do churches rise above the moral standards and teaching of the one who regularly provides spiritual nourishment. Third, much is at stake for the world. One need only observe the catastrophe of tele-evangelists gone astray to recognize how closely the world is watching those who claim to follow Jesus, especially those who serve in ministry. Our effectiveness in proclaiming the gospel to reach souls for Jesus is at stake.

> *"The ultimate measurement of ministry is faithfulness to God."*

## The Crisis in Ministry

Perhaps no task is as easy to fake as spiritual ministry. Preachers preach and teach with little or no study. Time pressures encourage plagiarized sermons and classes. Bulletin articles are copied without credit, or worse, copied and set forth as one's own effort. Ministers spend too little time in prayer, too little time speaking to God, too little time listening to God, all in the name of speaking for God. Some involved in ministry covertly pursue unethical, immoral lifestyles.

Compounding the crisis, our

contemporary society little appreciates genuine ministry not dependent upon outward appearances nor external circumstances. The rapid transitions of contemporary society have blurred definitions of ministry. In fact, that today's world often measures ministry by worldly standards encourages hypocrisy and the lack of ministerial integrity. Ministry is in ethical crisis.

Two questions may be helpful. What is the nature of this crisis? How may we encourage ethical ministry?

## The Nature of the Crisis

The crisis exhibits itself in all of the ways mentioned above and more. Heightening the dilemma is the fact that many church leaders and many preachers barely see the problem. How have we arrived at this point? Several factors have contributed to the crisis.

*Worldly expectations.* Our society, and churches which buy into the worldly mind set more than we like to admit, frequently set up expectations which do not appreciate the elastic, flexible nature of ministry. We do not yet know with certainty whether ministers work for God or for churches and elderships. We affirm the former, but most often practice the latter. We are more apt to clone preachers than to allow valid ministry consistent with the minister's personality.

*Lack of spiritual focus.* In my experience, preacher interviews seldom ask about personal spiritual health and growth. Have we forgotten that spiritual leaders must be spiritual? How can one minister God's presence effectively in the church when God is barely present in the life of the minister? Without spiritual focus, spiritual famine will eventually come. Genuine ministry is fraught with frailty, frustration, and even failure. The greatest failure, however, may be the failure to find the power for ministry in the spiritual rather than the physical realm.

*Misguided evaluation.* How shall ministry be measured? Consider two opposite extremes. On the one hand, worldly standards of success too often replace spiritual evaluation. Some churches fail to appreciate effective ministry in their demands for numerical results. God's Old Testament prophets would not have fared well in many modern churches. On the other hand, some churches and ministers fail to understand the power and potential of effective ministry, and suffer from under-expectation. The ultimate measurement of ministry is faithfulness to God. Ministry which is faithful to God never fails. Faithful ministry brings God's power to bear in this world, and God promises increase as his word never returns empty.

## Recovering Ethical Ministry

The recovery of ethical ministry demands that we face two concerns—the minister and the task of ministry. Where integrity, authenticity, credibility, and competence are lacking, the personal life of the minister must be repaired. Those who minister must be persons of integrity. No room may be given for even a moment to ministry's constant temptations--plagiarism, hypocrisy, ungodly attitudes, and unspiritual expectations. Paul's words to Timothy are vital (2 Timothy 4:2-5). Be prepared. No preacher should stand in the pulpit unprepared. Every lesson deserves study, and restudy. Every audience deserves a thoughtful application of God's message to their unique needs and circumstances. Effective ministry facilitates a fresh hearing so that the message might be understood and lived, because teaching is not just for believing, teaching is for living. Correction must be with great

> *"Effective ministry facilitates a fresh hearing so that the message might be understood and lived, because teaching is not just for believing, teaching is for living. ."*

patience, rebuke with careful instruction. Ministry should bring encouragement. Preachers must work, endure, and be level-headed in every situation. Churches want to know at least three things about a preacher. First, are you competent? Are you able to do what God wants done here and what we need done? Do you know what you are doing? Will you minister among us effectively? Second, are you "for us?" Will you try to understand us and bring God's word to us afresh? Will you cry with us and laugh with us? Will you endure with us and persevere? Or are we just another rung on a ladder you are trying to climb? Third, will you work reasonably hard? Are you willing to put in the hours, do the hard work of study, and share the difficult times in our lives? Ministers who cannot solidly answer "yes" to all three of these questions should rethink the task of ministry.

"Set an example for the believers…devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching...be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them...watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them...." (2 Timothy 4:12-16) Ethical ministry must set an example, be devoted to study, constantly consider one's personal life and teaching closely, persevere in every circumstance, and diligently preach and teach.

The motivation for such ministry comes from three sources: the example we are to set for the believers, the scriptural warrant we face when we look within ourselves through God's word, and the Christ to whom we are all ultimately accountable. May God help all who are involved in ministry in any way—preaching, teaching, counseling, encouraging—to recover ethical ministry which makes a difference in our world.

---

*Robert J. Young currently serves as Director of the Bible Program at Ohio Valley College. He preached full-time for over 30 years in Arkansas, Michigan, Oklahoma, and West Virginia.*

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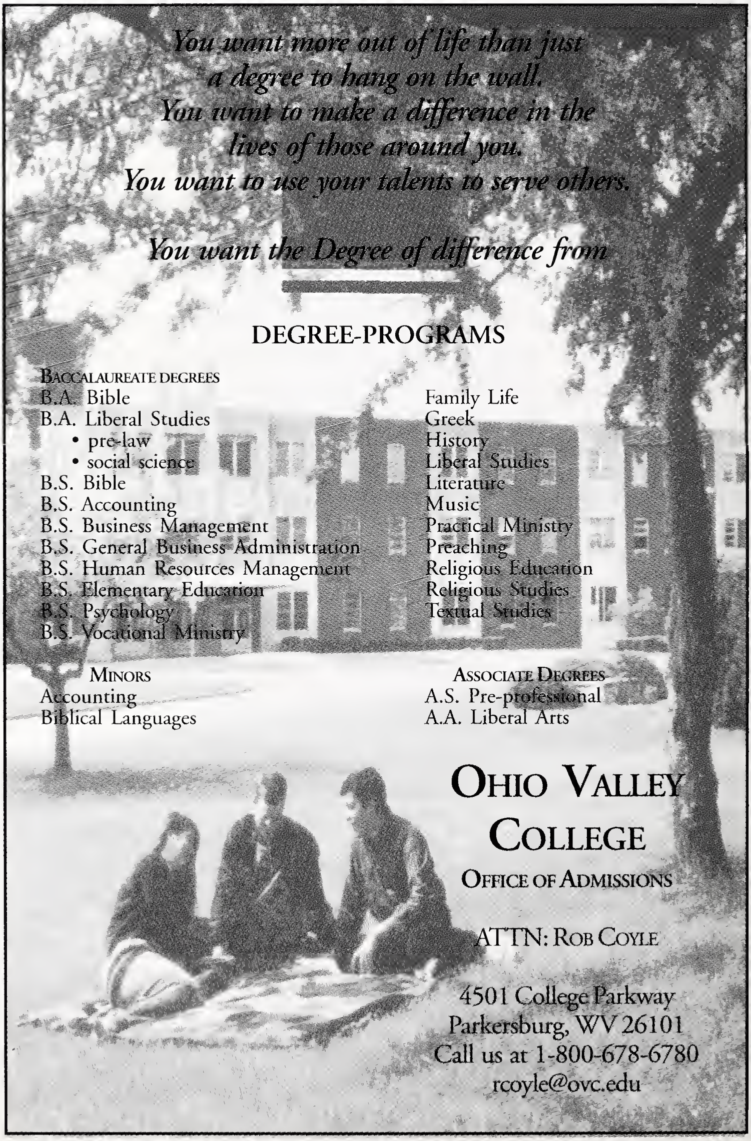

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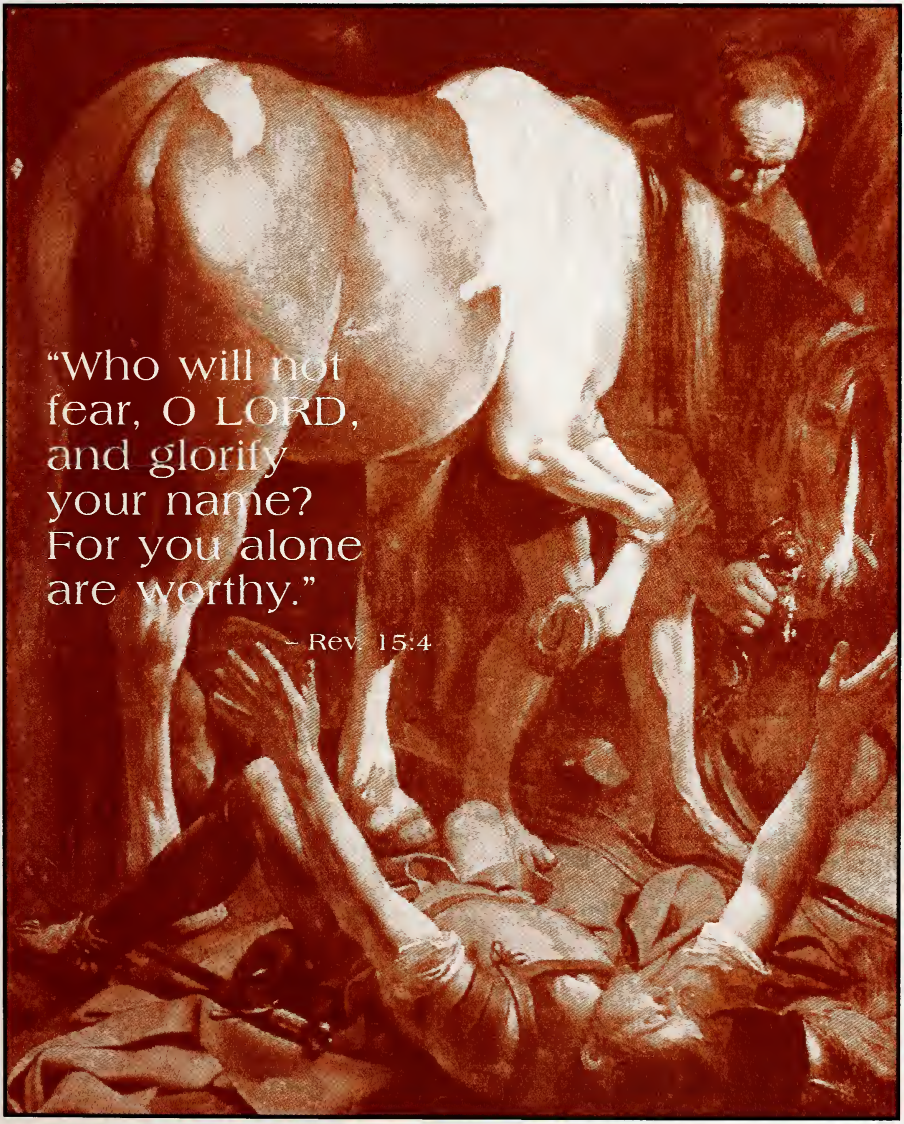

"Who will not fear, O LORD, and glorify your name? For you alone are worthy."

– Rev. 15:4

# CAROLINA christian

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# The Drawing Power of Fellowship

**Dennis Conner**

The light of the midnight moon shone on the Black Sea like the light of God's grace upon a sin–darkened world. We had gathered on the beach in Feodosia, Ukraine to witness the new birth of a teenage girl named Liza. Her sister, Victoria, was one of our interpreters and had lived with us during the previous year as an exchange student. She had become a Christian herself during that year. Sisters in the flesh, soon to become sisters in the Spirit.

The story of Liza's conversion to Christ is a testimony to the power of Christian fellowship to attract sinners to Christ. Though raised in an atheistic home, she had always believed in God. Upon finding out that her oldest daughter would be working as an interpreter during our youth mission to Feodosia, the girls' mother asked if Liza could also make the trip. Her hope was that Liza would be able to improve her English skills by being around Americans. There was also the hope, perhaps, that association with Christians would help make a difference in the behavior of her younger daughter. There could be no denying the change in Victoria's life, and the mother was hopeful that something similar might happen to her youngest daughter (the intent was far more pragmatic than spiritual). We were happy for the opportunity to reach Liza, so we invited her along. Mom got what she hoped for, and then some!

The group immediately took to Liza's outgoing personality, and she to them. She attended the classes, learned the new Christian songs (and sang them), and basked in the love of her new friends. During the course of the week Liza began thinking about becoming a Christian, but in our Bible studies she often took an opposing, questioning view. I later understood this to be her way of testing the waters and dealing with her apprehensions. She was questioning, but was also open.

We talked one morning after Liza had expressed an interest in being baptized. There was still some question about her full acceptance of the deity of Christ, and we talked about counting the cost. Liza decided to wait and give her decision more thought. Two days later, however, it would all change.

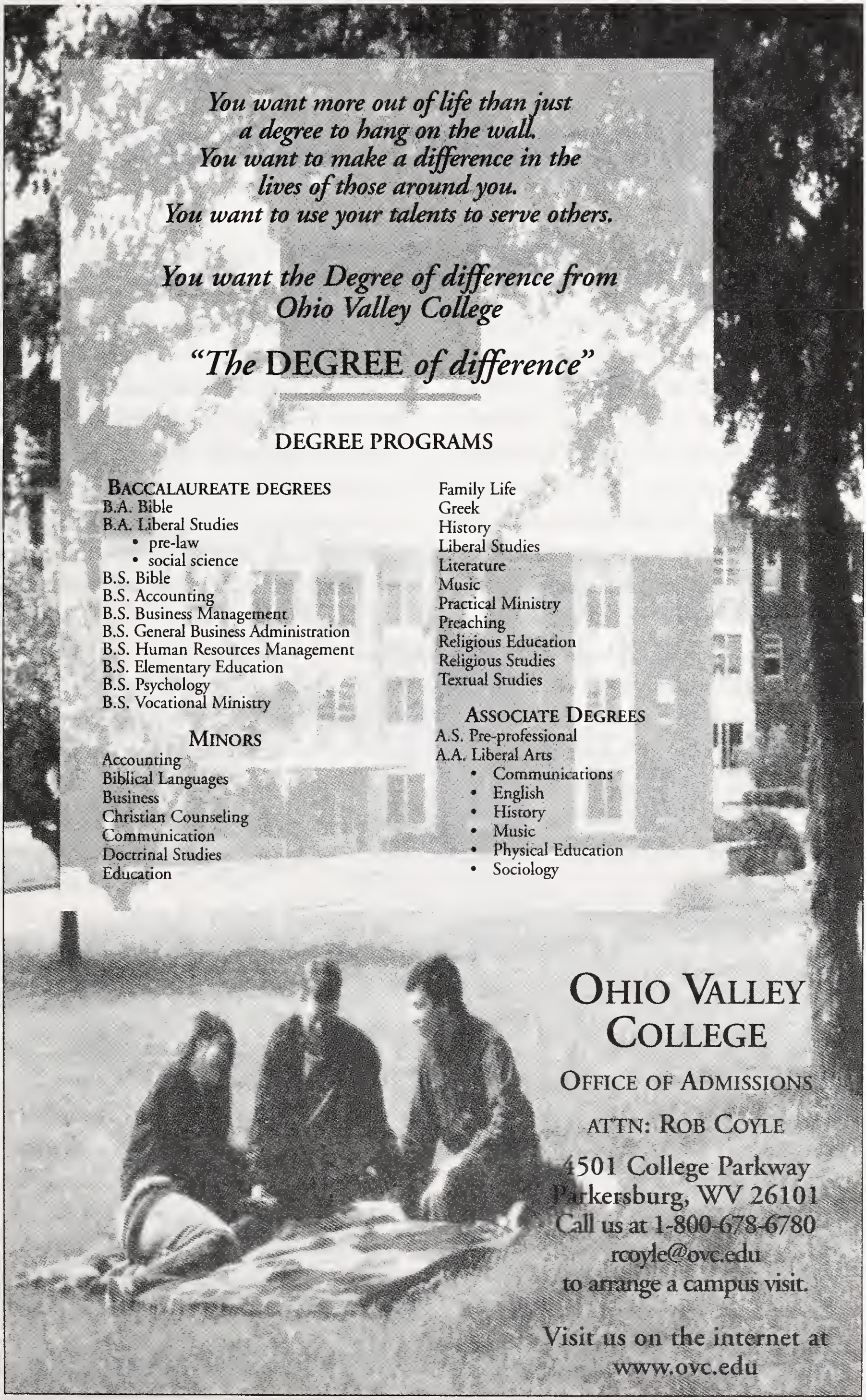
On the last night of our stay in Feodosia we enjoyed an evening of activities with the Ukrainian young people and then there was a devotional. While we were all singing I would glance periodically in Liza's direction, watching her as she discreetly wiped away a tear streaming down her cheek. The songs, the faces full of joy, the common love and acceptance, the fellowship—all were working together in concert to break down the last defenses in Liza's heart. Around midnight she made her decision. It would be for Christ.

"She succumbed to the allure of true fellowship in Christ, and that is the way it should be in the church."

In Feodosia God had brought together people from different countries and radically contrasting cultures and shaped us into a community that shared one thing in common: Christ. I thought afterwards that this is the church at its best, this is the power of a fellowship that is truly one in the spirit, one in the Lord. There were no barriers that could withstand the force of Christ's love in our hearts and lives; not culture, not language, not economical status, not even our flawed humanness. For Liza, it was different than anything she had ever encountered in her world, and it spoke to her heart. She succumbed to the allure of true fellowship in Christ, and that is the way it should be in the church.

When our best logic and most finely tuned arguments alone fail to persuade people, the power of a loving fellowship often succeeds. I have seen it happen time and time again. When people witness a group of folks who have transcended the self–serving attitudes so prevalent in the world, folks who have risen above the ambitious strife of other human pursuits, folks who truly care about one another and take care of each other, they are drawn to it. On the other hand, they are understandably repulsed by pettiness, strife, self–serving egos and factionalism. And why shouldn't they be? They can find plenty of that in the world.

There is power in Christ–centered fellowship: power to attract, power to convict, and power to change. We live in a society, a world, in which people are starving for a place to belong, a place to be loved and accepted, a place where their worth is affirmed. There is nothing like the appeal of Christian fellowship at its best. Just ask Liza.



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# Spiritual Metamorphosis

**Ron Newberry**

In Spanish it is known as *mariposa.* In German it is called *schmetterling.* The ancient Greeks referred to it as *psyche.* To the French it is *papillon.* They have names like *painted ladies, red admirals* and *monarchs.* We call them butterflies.

Of all of God's creatures, the butterfly has to be one of the most remarkable. They come in all sizes and colors. They live in virtually every part of the world except the really cold climates. They are delicate, beautiful and yet powerful flyers. Monarchs travel distances as great as 3,100 miles during their migration to Mexico, traveling roughly 50 miles per day. Monarch flight speeds have been measured at 12 miles per hour—not bad for such a delicate creature.

The most amazing thing to me about butterflies is the various stages in the life cycle. The transformation from a caterpillar to the pupa to the butterfly is truly remarkable. An unpleasant looking caterpillar hides itself in a chrysalis. Something marvelous then happens inside and it is changed. When it emerges its earthbound existence is over. Beautiful wings take to the sky. It is free!

The process of the transformation of a caterpillar to a butterfly is known as *metamorphosis.* It means to change to another form, to transform. Metamorphosis is not cosmetic. That is, it isn't just a superficial exterior change. It isn't a "makeover." Rather, some fundamental things have changed.

The ironic part of the process is that without the struggle to get free of the encasement in which the transformation takes place, the wings with which to fly cannot develop. The struggle to get free forces the fluids into the wings and allows them to reach their potential.

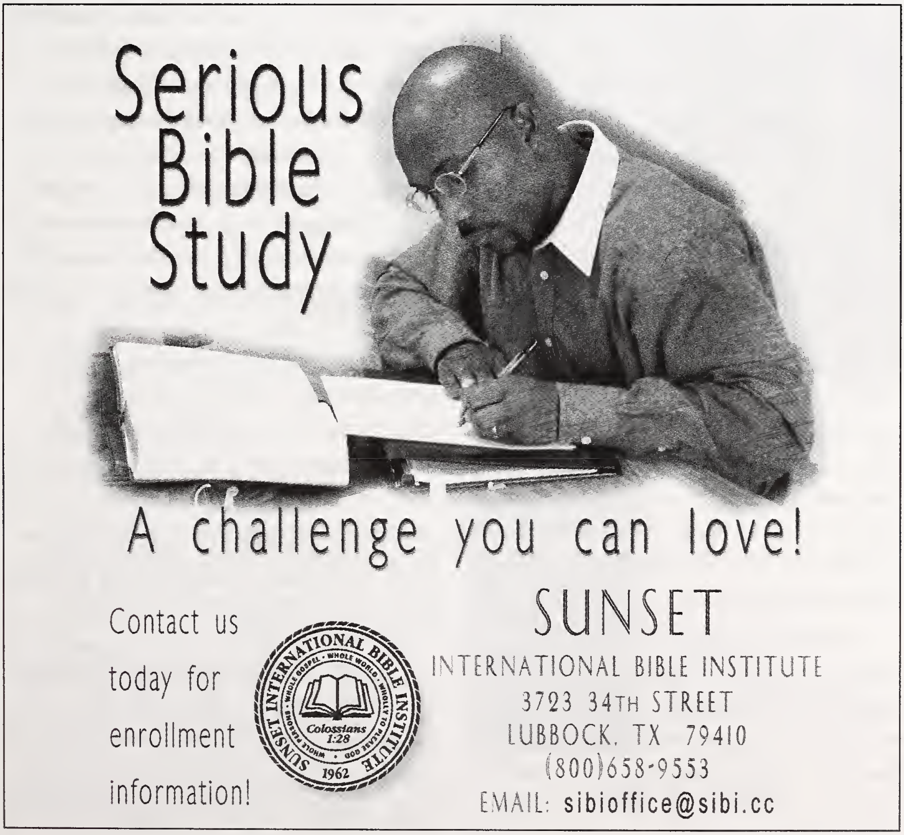
There is a parallel here for us. While we may view some events as painful struggles, they are actually part of becoming capable of emerging as a beautiful spiritual being. A transformation can take place in our lives as we struggle to cope with new and stressful situations. Through necessity we are forced to learn how to survive. Once we have made it through the process, we are never the same. We learn how to stretch our wings and fly.

It should not be surprising to find Paul using the term in Romans 12:2, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." He uses it again in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever–increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

The butterfly is a powerful symbol of

the kind of transformation that takes place in a person who is changed by the renewing of the mind. Ultimately Paul says in Philippians 3:21 that our Savior will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. So on two planes the butterfly analogy is helpful. It stresses the necessity of struggles to become mature, equipped to reach our personal destiny. It also serves to remind us of the process by which we become mature spiritually.

When you spot a butterfly on the wing this summer, remember what it took for that magnificent creature to make it to the stage of beauty you see. Remember also that just as all butterflies began as caterpillars, all of us who would fly high must pass through that caterpillar stage as well. If you're a caterpillar now, just look forward to the day when with God's help you can take wing and be free.



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# Letter to the Editor

**Dear brother Conner and beloved brethren:**

The New Testament church—elders, deacons, evangelists, preachers, teachers, members and those with influential powers in Christian colleges—have not yet succeeded in maintaining the faith of the early church regarding racial relations among brethren (Ephesians 4:3; Jude 3; Acts 2; Acts 10:35; Romans 12:9-10; John 13:34-35; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 Peter 2:17). In Hebrews 13:1 the writer said, "let brotherly love continue." Animosities are still present in the church; this is a digression from the faith, not a progression of the faith.

I fear that in many cases our leaders, like Saul in 1 Samuel 17:10-11, 24, are fearful to fight the giant Goliath (prejudice, racial hatred), holding all Israel (the church) at bay, being dismayed and afraid. Be admonished that God rent the kingdom from the leader then (1 Samuel 15) and will do the same in New Testament times (Revelation 2:4-5). Still, God's grace and mercy grant repentance.

As long as this state exists, the church will not be within the spirit of 1 John 4:7-9 and will not be effective in the salvation of souls in the world. Racial hatred is the giant in the world. Goliath is defying the armies of God and reproach in on the church because of it (Proverbs 14:34).

The Lord's church exists to serve the needs of all people, especially those of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10). Has not wisdom taught us that there can be no racial hatred or animosity among God's people, of God's people, and by God's people (Acts 15:6-11; Galatians 3:28)! There can be no fellowship with attitudes of the world (racial hatred, prejudice and animosity).

While church leaders today are dogmatic regarding a number of biblical doctrines (such as singing without instruments)—and it is certainly commendable to be devoted to biblical teaching—the Scriptures just as emphatically and dogmatically command that *love be without hypocrisy* (Romans 12:9).

Today there are many social and demographic concerns facing the church: mixed marriages, influx of diverse ethnic peoples, change in racial composition of neighborhoods around established congregations. All of these are a challenge to our commitment to God to maintain the church for all people for all times.

The great commission of Matthew 28:18-28 includes *all* people. In particular, verse 20 says, "teach them to observe all things I have commanded you." It seems that this commandment has often been taken to mean that the disciples were just to *verbally* teach others what they had been taught…Look again. "Teaching them to *observe* (watch, heed, keep—*Smith's Bible Dictionary*) all things I have commanded you." God's people are living epistles known and read of all men. The lives of God's people are manifestly declared epistles. This practical manifestation is a result of Christians' obedience to the commands to love one another while maintaining the command to evangelize. Then the true church will be manifestly observed until the end of the ages.

Beloved brethren, hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches now before it is eternally too late.

**For the love of the brotherhood,**
*Charles A. Leak*
(member of the Carver Rd.
Church of Christ)
3007 Walsh St.
Winston-Salem, NC 27107

***Editor's note:*** *While progress has been made in race relations in our society, no one would deny that there is still much to do. Similarly, while it may be true that progress has also been made in the church, the reality is that there is still much to do here as well. Some may not agree with thetone of brother Leak's letter, but surely no one can deny the urgency of his appeal. Conversations with brother Leak have shown him to be concerned about all forms of prejudice; not merely white toward black. His vision is for a church in which all barriers are torn down and we truly worship and serve God together. The willingness of the church to demonstrate genuine love toward all people is vital to the integrity of its witness and mission in our society.*

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# Almost Heaven

**Paul Jarrett**

When the DJ on the radio station that I was tuned to on my car radio made the announcement, I was thrilled! I turned the car in the direction of home immediately, wanting to share the good news with my wife, Patty. John Denver, our favorite singer and song writer, was scheduled for a concert at Cleveland Coliseum. Tickets were going on sale that very day, so in addition to wanting to share the good news with my wife, I also wanted to head to the ticket stand within the hour.

> "I learned the value of our earthly homes…I also learned something about the appeal of heaven."

I must admit that there was a little incentive for my haste. John Denver had been in Cleveland for a concert earlier, and I had failed to buy tickets in time, much to Paty's chagrin. This up–coming concert offered me a chance not only to hear John Denver, but also to buy my way back into Patty's good grace!

The necessity of this was heightened by the fact that our relationship had been under quite a bit of strain over the preceding months. The arrival of our third child, the necessity of Patty taking a part–time job that summer, and my misguided idea regarding how "helpful" it would be to have a friend of ours who had just graduated from high school to spend the summer with us, had combined to put a physical and emotional strain on our relationship. This concert seemed to be a way of exhibiting my love and providing a little time for us to renew the romance in our relationship.

When I arrived home and shared the good news with Patty, she was excited about going. I grabbed the checkbook and headed for the car to go purchase the tickets. Suddenly, it hit me! We couldn't attend the concert! The date it was scheduled for was the Saturday on which our fall revival at church would be concluding.

For a moment I wished I were simply one of the members and not the minister. If I had been, I would have been tempted to skip that final service. However, I knew that even though I would not be doing the preaching, this meeting held priority over any concert.

I went back to the house and broke the news to Patty. She understood, but she was disappointed. And so was I. I would keep listening to the radio and if the one concert sold out, perhaps they might schedule a second one. If they did, we would go if at all possible.

As it turned out, that's exactly what happened. There would be a second concert on that same Saturday, only it would begin at midnight. We could go, but it was going to be a long night and I had to preach that Sunday morning. Still, we decided to make the effort.

The decision made, the tickets purchased, and baby sitters secured, we awaited the date for the concert. The days passed quickly and the week prior to the concert was filled with all the activities which surround a revival, allowing no time for impatience. The day for the outing came soon enough.

It was a beautiful autumn evening. We admired the full moon as we sat stuck in traffic on I-271, at least five miles from the Coliseum parking lot. Those, like us, who had purchased tickets for the midnight show were having difficulty entering a parking lot that was only slowly emptying out the cars from the earlier sold–out show.

Normally I would have worked myself into a frenzy when faced with such a massive traffic jam. I am not the most patient person, especially when I am trying to get somewhere "on time," which for me means at least 15 minutes early! Patty and I have had many a confrontation over the years because of my impatience and her tardiness (she actually believes a 7:30 appointment means you do not have to be there till 7:30!)

Despite my history of impatience, for some reason my mood was different that evening. At theclosing service of our revival that night, the visiting preacher had talked about the joys of our heavenly home. He had gotten me to thinking not only about heaven, but about home. As we sat there in that traffic jam, Patty and I had time alone to talk; something which had been scarce over the past few months.

We talked about the sermon we had just heard and about the feelings it had stirred within us. I especially shared with her my regret for those times when I caused her hurt. I asked her forgiveness and inquired as to what I could do to make amends when I caused her pain. I mentioned the fact that I wanted to know because God had told me to care for her as my own body.

In response to this she asked me, “What do you do when you hit your finger with a hammer?”

I responded, “I yell and scream and probably throw the hammer.”

“Yes,” she said, “but you also kiss your finger to make it feel better.”

How true, and how often I had failed to love her hurts away!

At that moment we were very close. The traffic delay was a blessing, not a curse. In looking back on it, I wonder how many times God has been slowing me down for a purpose, but my impatience causes me to miss that purpose?

Eventually the traffic cleared and we made our way to our seats in the coliseum. Shortly after we were seated, they announced the start of the concert would be delayed to permit those still caught in traffic to arrive. Though this meant our night would be prolonged, Patty and I had no complaints. We were enjoying visiting with each other and getting reacquainted after our busy summer.

About fifteen minutes after we had taken our seats, a couple entered the aisle in front of us. They caught our eye for two reasons. First, they had their little girl with them. She was about four years old and it brought to mind our own daughter (who was about the same age at that time) and two sons who were by now asleep in their own beds. We wondered why anyone would have such a young child out so late?

The second thing which caught our attention was related, at least in part, to the question which had just been raised in our own mind. It was obvious the father was not overly thrilled with the child’s presence. That, perhaps, coupled with the traffic delay we had just experienced, had put him in a decidedly bad mood. As I observed his conduct, I caught a glimpse of how I sometimes get when things do not go as I would like. It wasn’t a pleasant sight.

The man snapped at his wife, going so far on one occasion as to make a threatening gesture. After the verbal warfare ceased they settled into their separate camps of silence with their daughter’s seat between them. At one point the little girl attempted to bridge her father’s anger by moving to get into his lap, but she was promptly pushed away. She took solace instead on her mother’s lap. The silent truce continued as the show began.

The opening act was better than we had expected, but I must admit I was somewhat distracted by the domestic war being waged in the row in front of me. I felt sorry for them, especially the little girl. But, I also found myself identifying with the situation. I knew that under different circumstances the traffic problems that evening might have provoked similar conduct on my part.

The silence in front of us prevailed throughout the opening act. Even the arrival of John Denver on stage for the start of his performance seemed to do little to lift the mood of the threesome whose conduct had drawn my attention. Denver's presence did cause me to forget the couple and child for a little while, until something happened to renew my interest in this human drama.

Denver began to sing *"Back Home Again."* As he began this moving tribute to the appeal of home and hearth, my attention was once more drawn to the warring couple in front of me. I wondered what emotions were being stirred within them as Denver sang these words of the chorus:

> "Hey, it's good to be
> back home again.
> Sometimes this old farm
> Feels like a long lost friend.
> Hey, it's good to be
> back home again,"

I did not yet know what kind of effect the words of this song were having on the couple in front of me, but I knew the emotions that were rising in my own heart. As I looked at the little girl on the seat ahead, I thought of my own daughter asleep at home. I remembered the times I had brushed her, or one of her brothers, aside as the man had done with his daughter earlier. Like him, I had at times, been too busy or too caught up in my own hurts and frustrations to see how my gruffness was hurting others. At that moment I was ready to reach over the seat and take that little girl into my own arms and hold her for all the times I had failed to hold my own children. I did draw my arm a little tighter around Patty as I thought of how many times I had failed to kiss her hurts away.

The emotions I was feeling continued to build as Denver invited the audience to join him in the singing of the song. As upwards of 15,000 voices joined in the singing early on what was now a Sunday morning, the moment took on a spiritual meaning for me. Surely the same feelings were being experienced by all those present, including the players in the drama before me, as we sang:

> "It's the sweetest thing I know of,
> just spending time with you.
> It's the little things that make
> a house a home.
> Like a fire softly burning, and
> supper on the stove,
> and the light in your eyes that
> make me warm."

As we sang the words of this verse, what by now had become my prayer, was answered. The man ahead reached over and took the sleepy–eyed little girl onto his lap. Cradling her with his left arm, his right arm encircled his wife. With tears filling my eyes, I joined all those present in singing the chorus with heart–felt emotion:

> "Hey, it's good to be
> back home again.
> Sometimes this old farm
> Feels like a long lost friend.
> Hey, it's good to be
> back home again."

Several minutes later the concert ended with the song I'd especially come to hear, *"Country Roads."* Being a West Virginia native, I identified with this song which, though lacking in geographical accuracy, paid tribute to the state I call home.

From the experience of the evening, however, I had come to appreciate the broader appeal of *"Country Roads."* The appeal is not just to West Virginians. It appeals to all those who have an appreciation for the worth of home and family. It may be hard for a native mountaineer to admit, but it is not West Virginia that is *"Almost Heaven."* Rather, it is home, wherever that may be, that is truly almost heaven.

I learned two lessons that night. I learned the value of our earthly homes, and the importance of only fighting to maintain those relationships that mean so very much to us. I also learned something about the appeal of heaven. It is the appeal of home and our journey there (like the trips made so many times over those narrow, twisting country roads of West Virginia) is made easier by the knowledge that we're going home!

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*Paul Jarrett preaches for the Naples Church of Christ in Naples, FL. He can be contacted at 1450 Mandarin Rd., Naples, FL 34102. This article recalls an incident in his life that occurred in the fall of 1976.*

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# Now or Eternity?

**Peter Rode**

Little things can be very significant in our lives. Remember the old proverb,

> For want of a nail,
> the shoe was lost;
> For want of the shoe,
> the horse was lost;
> For want of the horse,
> the rider was lost;
> For want of the rider,
> the battle was lost;
> For want of the battle,
> the kingdom was lost;
> And all from the want
> of a horseshoe nail.

It has been said that a single grain of sand in the kidney of Oliver Cromwell changed the course of British and world history. A small but fatal bullet ended the dream of an American Camelot. Little things can become extremely significant.

In Genesis 25:19-34 we see a seemingly minor incident change the lives, not only for these two young men, but the history of the world. Esau had been out hunting. He may have been gone for days, maybe weeks. When he returned he was extremely hungry—apparently he had not been very successful. His brother, Jacob, was cooking a lentil stew and the smell was intoxicating to Esau. He begged his twin for something to eat and told Jacob that he was "going to die" if he didn't get something to eat. So Jacob made a deal with Esau. Since Esau was "going to die" from hunger, his birthright wouldn't be of any use to him. So Jacob proposed an exchange—a meal for a birthright.

Esau had a choice: should he take the food and give up the birthright, or should he hold on to this most valuable possession and try to find food somewhere else? He chose to live for the moment and swore that the birthright now belonged to Jacob. Surely he didn't realize the value of what had been promised to him.

We shake our heads at his short–sightedness, but don't we do the same sort of thing?

- We choose the pleasures of passion over the purity of marriage.
- We choose the applause of our friends rather than stand true for the Lord.
- We choose what is easy over what is right.
- We indulge our appetite for more stuff over the commands of financial responsibility.
- We choose the extra time to sleep over worship or our daily time with God.

- We choose to fill our minds with garbage rather than devote our minds to the Lord.
- We choose to hoard what we have rather than to reach out to the needy.

Esau had to choose between living for the moment and living for eternity. That same choice faces each of us. Every day we must choose between temporary pleasures or holiness before the Lord. Esau reminds us to keep our focus.

This simple story calls us to an important decision: whom will we trust? Who will you trust when the walls of life come falling in on you? Who will you trust as you make daily decisions in your life? Who will you trust for eternity? Will you continue to rely on yourself, or will you place all your hope, confidence and energy in following the One who died in your place on the cross? This is the choice of a lifetime. It's a choice that affects everything we do. And the choice you make will not only affect your future; it will affect your forever. No matter what kind of person—or your brother—are.

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*Peter Rode can be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.*

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# One Year Later: Part 1

**Phil Stapp**

*"The poor and needy search for water, but there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the LORD will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs. I will put in the desert the cedar and the acacia, the myrtle and the olive. I will set pines in the wasteland, the fir and the cypress together, so that people may see and know, may consider and understand, that the hand of the LORD has done this, that the Holy One of Israel has created it" (Isaiah 41:17-20).*

I was parched, thirsty and tired. My soul was weary and my heart ached. After seventeen years of full time ministry the well had run dry. There was nothing left to give. Some call it "burn out," I prefer the term "compassion fatigue." It is a condition brought on by years of giving more love and compassion than one receives. I was aware of the condition and had been fighting the affects of it for years, but when I saw my entire family suffering from it, I knew that it was time for a change. We needed time to heal.

It is now one year later and as I reflect back Iwould like to share what I have experienced and learned.

> "In all of this has been the comforting hand of God working through his Spirit to comfort my soul."

My God is a compassionate and tender God who truly refreshes the souls of those who come to him and thirst. In more ways than I will ever understand, God has brought water to this parched soul. Springs of water have appeared in the desert of my heart and there is no doubt that the LORD has done this.

God has refreshed my life through Bible study, prayer and meditation as well as through many other avenues. He has used a loving family, caring friends and a new job that I love to quench my thirst and soothe my soul. He has given us a new church family that has been gentle, kind and sensitive to our needs. His refreshing has come through tender words from others, time with my sons, the enthusiastic lick of my black Lab who loves without condition, and the tender, affirming touch of my wife. Peace has been found in the middle of a mountain stream, just me, the trout and my

God. His love has been poured out as I have found new ways to serve him and minister to others. In all of this has been the comforting hand of God working through his Spirit to comfort my soul.

God is also refreshing my family. They were affected by "compassion fatigue" as well as by my struggles and weariness. Monday was "stay away from dad" day. The emotional exhaustion I often suffered on Sunday led them to feel I was not fit to be around on Monday, and they were usually right. But peace and joy seem to be returning to their lives as the compassionate hand of God works in them and for them.

His refreshing love and power are an amazing thing. As Isaiah says, "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint" (Is.40:28-31).

I have always enjoyed the picture painted by these words. Through the experiences of the last year I now understand the power of their message even more. Without his strength I would not have survived the seventeen years of full time ministry. Without his renewing power I would not be where I am today. And while I would not yet describe myself as having mounted up on "wings of eagles," I know that my God is gently moving me and my family in that direction.

Why God placed me in the situation that he did, with so many high maintenance people and crisis situations, I do not know. It would have been easy to be bitter at the people, the church and at even at God. But I have no regrets. I truly believe that I was doing what God wanted me to do, where he wanted me to do it. That belief has brought me great relief and peace. What God has planned for me in the future I do not know, but I do know that his refreshing love will prepare me for it and his renewing power will carry me through it. And so I wait, drinking in the life giving waters of my God and know that one day I will soar.

---

*Phil Stapp can be contacted at 269 Scottsdale Lane, Clemmons, NC 27012; or by e-mail at: pstapp1@prodigy.net*

# Letters From Grandmother

**Shayla Rawley**

In this article I will be quoting parts of letters that my grandmother wrote to my parents in 1976 shortly after her baptism into Christ. She was in her sixties. You see, my grandmother was a very intellectual person and she felt the need to tell others, especially her other children, why she decided to live in Christ. She died in August of 2000, and I first had a chance to read these letters over Christmas last year. I always wished I had taken the opportunity to get to know her better, and through these letters I feel like I know her better now than I ever have before.

"I grew up in a home where Bible reading and prayer was an everyday part of life. I believed in God and in His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, my Savior. However, in recent years through studying the Bible, I began to realize that my childhood baptism was more a dedication, a promise that my parents would raise me in a Christian manner It was not a choice made personally to dedicate myself to Christ. I became convinced that baptism should be by immersion in water, Christ Himself was baptized in this manner... Yet, I waited for another, a loved one to take the step with me..."

She loved my grandfather dearly, in spite of all his shortcomings. The biggest obstacle my grandmother faced was my grandfather. He had very little, if any, belief in God and, from what I understand, he thought baptism was a waste of time. But my grandmother hoped and prayed that he would have a change of heart.

*"I pondered over baptism and struggled within myself, for the feeling persisted that I was leaving behind a loved one."* It took her a while to even tell him that she had been baptized, but she said she had never kept a secret from him. She just wanted him to know how great it was being a child of God.

"I felt so deeply about baptism and the wonder of peace and tranquillity within. I'd hoped he might sense my joy too, he still doesn't understand, but *maybe someday...*"

Unfortunately, he never understood. It is difficult for me to condense everything she wrote because almost everything is rich in useful information. She wanted to keep the feelings she experienced through baptism into Christ fresh on her mind and share them with everyone.

"The water seemed so clean, suddenly anxiety left me, I experienced a sensation of great and complete peace. Then I was rising from the water. It seemed to me that I'd had a long peaceful sleep. As I made my way up out of the water, I remember thinking that I'd never felt so clean, so rested, *so free of fears, so at peace!"*

Aside from analyzing the whole experience, she also had a very poetic analogy expressing her joy:

"Everything comes to new life after the long dark winter days. I feel the *same within me, a new spiritual Spring."*

As young people, we seldom think about getting to know our grandparents before it is too late. There is so much we can learn from those who have already traveled down this road of Christianity about how to love God and serve Him better.

As my grandmother once prayed,

"May we all grow in Thy light, the better to obey Thy bidding the better to *serve Thee."*

---

*Shayla Rawley lives in Greenville, NC and worships with the Greenville Church of Christ. The letters were written by her grandmother, Christina Rawley.*

# Toward Better Service

We would like to apologize to our readers for the late arrival of the past few issues of *Carolina Christian.* A number of factors have been responsible—some subject to our control, some not. One problem we have run into is the way we now mail the paper. In the past we have used string, wrapping paper and rubber bands in combination as we prepared bundles for mailing. Earlier in the year the regional supervisor of mailing permits instructed us not to use string and recommended only rubber bands. We complied, and well, in many cases the rubber bands broke! Consequently, large quantities of magazines have been returned to us without theaddress labels. This has happened the past two mailings. If you did not receive your copies, please contact us and we will send them to you again (PO Box 1369, Yadkinville, NC 27055; or by e-mail at yadkincoc @hotmail.com).

We realize that you want to receive your copy of the magazine in a timely fashion. We pledge that we will do our best to make that happen. Thank you all so much for your continued support, your kind words for the work we are doing, and for your patience!

# When Christians Disagree . . . .

**Jerry Senn**

Honest disagreement is a fact of life for all sincere seekers of truth. In the realm of Christianity, if everyone believed the Bible and responded to God's love exactly alike we would either cease being honest or stop seeking truth. This is because all humans are different—no two of us are alike. More than in size, shape, height, and weight differences, our temperaments, abilities and backgrounds vary widely. We're thankful for this. In fact, what a boring world it would be if all were just alike.

How, then, are we to achieve genuine unity? How is it possible? Here are some thoughts that may help.

1. *Biblical unity doesn't involve agreement on every Scriptural issue.* That would be impossible and God doesn't expect the impossible. Gus Nichols was one of Christ's greatest preachers of the past century. He held the view that a man may serve as elder in a local church without being married. He even debated the issue. Though many disagreed with his view, he was never withdrawn from or ostracized. Leslie G. Thomas wrote the *Gospel Advocate Annual Commentary* for many years. All the while he believed that Christians receive at conversion "the baptism of the Holy Spirit." That was a hotly debated issue at the time and few agreed with brother Thomas, but he was still our brother "in good standing." Tolbert Fanning, the founder of the *Gospel Advocate,* opposed the idea of churches having a paid "located preacher." Yet, his work has always been applauded. Alexander Campbell was a millennialist and Barton Stone believed in the "direct work" of the Holy Spirit. Though all these brethren held to doctrinal views that may have been controversial in their time, they were still highly respected. Who would not want to be associated with these men of God, despite their doctrinal differences and the disagreement with them?

2. *Every Christian is free under Christ to study the word of God and draw conclusions for himself or herself.* In order for Christianity to be genuine it must be founded on personal faith. There are no second generation Christians! God honors and protects—by His teaching—the right of one to follow his or her own conscience. Believers are instructed to respect and value the positions taken by others (Romans 14).

*(continued on page 24)*

As a young man in Zimbabwe, Hailey Mlangeni had a dream. He wanted to teach the gospel of Christ to his own country. But where could he find the education and the resources to make his dream come true? Through a visiting missionary, Hailey learned about Heritage Christian University and was soon on a plane to Florence, Alabama.

After two years as a student, Hailey says of his experience, *"This university is truly giving me what I need to return to Africa and be effective in my ministry. Heritage Christian is the only place for me."* Hailey's dream has grown. Now he also dreams of building a school that trains others to teach the gospel.

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Therefore, local churches should never allow the teaching or opinions of one or two men to dominate biblical discussions.

3. *Human creeds, written or unwritten, are to be rejected.* Hear me out on this one. Anytime the thinking of a few is allowed to prevail, the tendency is for the less resourceful, less diligent, slower learners to simply allow the prevailing view to go unchecked and unchallenged. This is one of the first signs of the fatal disease known as *sectarianism.* The only authority in religious matters is the Bible, written under the authority of Jesus Christ. No man can lay claim to knowing everything or speaking for everyone. Christ is our only high priest and King.

4. *A non–threatening environment which encourages personal study and welcomes thoughtful questions is essential for genuine unity to exist.* The strong–willed, though well informed, may discourage others from thinking through issues by not listening to or respecting the views of others. Over–reacting to opposing issues stifles openness and acceptance. Good teachers are also good listeners. Being overly defensive is a strong indication of pride.

5. *Some issues must be settled and agreed upon by all.* Representative of these kinds of issues are: the Bible as our sole authority; a faith response to God's grace as the way of admission into relationship with Christ at the point of baptism (Galatians 3:27); or, the deity of Christ. All who are in Christ will take the Bible as their only authority in matters of faith and practice. They will agree to allow only the Scriptures to hold final sway on every spiritual issue. They will not rely on human opinions or rest their case on the thinking of others, but upon their own study and commitment to unity (Ephesians 4:1-3).

Thomas Campbell said it well in his *Declaration and Address,* Section 6: "That although inferences and deductions from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet they are not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so; for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but the power and veracity of God."

Yes, Christians often disagree. However, we must never insist that everyone agree with us in order to be considered a faithful brother or sister. "Love suffereth long and is kind," (1 Corinthians 13:4 KJV). Let's learn to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) as we teach, admonish, serve, give, and grow in grace and knowledge!"

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*Jerry Senn serves the Hendersonville Church of Christ as preacher and elder. He also served on the board of Carolina Christian Publications for many years. He can be contacted at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28791.*

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**David Carter**

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Our Sunday morning attendance has grown from 25 to 35 just a couple of years ago to 55 to 70 now. We bring back 40 plus on Sunday night and Wednesday night. Our contribution, though growing, is not able to support our minister full time and our building is getting tight. Our preacher is presently working a full time job while keeping up with his work for the Lord.

We are asking for some temporary support (two to three years) so he may devote his full attention to reaching the lost and strengthening the new to Christ and His Church. Prayerfully, we are looking for a few Churches to help for just a little while. We need to replace about $24,000/year. Would you consider being a part of our outreach?

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# "What It's All About"

**Dennis Conner**

One of the great Christian devotional classics is Augustine's *Confessions.* It has been called "one of the most moving diaries ever recorded of a man's journey to the fountain of God's grace." In this diary we see the author, a fourth century Christian, not as a "saint" who practices a superhuman holiness, but as a fellow traveler like ourselves. He bares his soul and shares his insights about life both in the world and in Christ. The reading of Augustine's story has helped and encouraged believers for centuries.

An even more powerful diary can be found in the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes. Here, the Teacher (or Preacher), as the author refers to himself, bares his soul as he tells us about his doubts and observations about life and all the dead–end streets he has explored. And he tells us for our own good. He hopes that we will listen and learn from his experiences. And just what is it that he hopes we will learn? That without God, life is empty; without God, life is reduced to a pointless, self-indulgent existence. He begins the book by raising life's most fundamental question: What is life all about? In the epilogue (Ecclesiastes 12:9-14) he sums up the learning of a lifetime in the hope that someone will listen and learn.

## An Admonishment to Listen (vv. 9-12)

*"Not only was the Teacher wise, but also he imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true. The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one Shepherd. Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body."*

The Teacher's craft is described and analyzed as it pertains to the communication of truth. His primary task is to teach the people knowledge, and he takes this seriously. He ponders, he searches out diligently, and he arranges orderly. His craft involves words, so he gives careful attention to how he says things—he wants to say the right things the right way. Did he accomplish that? And how!

These words, he says, are like "goads" and "nails." As goads, they prod us to wake up to therealities of life, to pay attention. As nails, they are truths driven deeply into the very depths of our being. In other words, the Teacher intends for his readers to get the point!

*(continued on page 28)*

**What He Has Learned (vv.13-14)**

*"Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."*

When all the questions have been asked, all the avenues explored, all the dead–end streets traveled, two fundamental truths remain ever true. This is the meaning of life; this is what it's all about.

First, *fear God.* Tremble before his greatness and live in view of His power and majesty. Reverence Him. Put God at the center of life and live constantly in awe of Him. When we fear God we will never worship the lesser gods of pleasure, wealth, things, human wisdom and endeavor, and status. "The remarkable thing about fearing God," wrote Oswald Chambers, "is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else; whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else."

Second, *keep His commandments.* Obedience to God is the natural outgrowth of reverence; it is the evidence of the creature's respect for the Creator. In an age such as ours—an age in which moral relativism and the idolatry of self hold sway—this is not a welcomed concept. However, the fact is that there is little difference between our age and that of the Preacher's. Even then, as his varied pursuits attest, self was the driving force in life and society, so the Preacher's message remains amazingly relevant. His point holds true to this day: the life that honors the divine–human order is the most fulfilling life.

In fact, he argues, this is exactly what life is all about and what man is to be about. The word "duty" does not appear in the Hebrew text. Literally it reads, "…for this is the whole (or wholeness) of man." The thought is that this is what man is about. This was man's intended purpose in life. Man was never meant to live in rebellion against God. The emptiness and uselessness that the Teacher experienced in his own life were the inevitable results of a life that had rejected the will and guidance of God. The emptiness of life "under the sun"—the fragmentation and brokenness and disillusionment—is not what God wants for us. Never has been, never will be. When the Teacher took the time to examine life under the sun, he could see no point to it, but when he brought God back into his worldview, life became whole.

Reverence and obedience, then, are the keys to meaning and wholeness. Here we find the ultimate reality, and ourselves.

There is yet one more reason for reverence and obedience to be kept in mind, "For God will bring every deed into judgment…" In other words, *accountability.* One day we will be held accountable for what we have done with the life God has given us. Will we opt for emptiness or wholeness?

He who has ears to hear, let him listen to wisdom's Teacher.

# Today's Trends

- According to the March, 2001 issue of *American Demographics,* which reported on a study by Public Agenda, two–thirds of Americans say they want religion to play a greater role in our society. 69% say religion is the best way to strengthen family values and 62% say it's most important for religion to influence personal behavior. Only 25% say that reliance on religion isn't necessary.

- A recent study by Carl S. Dudley and David S. Roozen of Hartford Seminary found that smaller churches are still the norm in America. Their poll involved 14,301 congregations in 41 denominations and faith groups. They found that: half of all congregations have fewer than 100 regularly participating adults, and 25% have fewer than 50; fewer than 10% of congregations have 1,000 or more participating adults; 52% of congregations are located in small towns and rural areas; church growth in the West surpassed the South in the past decade (*Leadership,* Summer, 2001).

- According to Gallup studies, three–fourths of Americans think that more than one religion offers a true path to God. Only one in six think that their religion is the best path to God. These statistics would seem to suggest that the pluralism that largely defines our American society is also having an impact on religious beliefs *(Emerging Trends).*

- According to the Princeton Religion Research Center, the US is second only to Ireland in monthly church attendance among industrialized democracies. In Ireland 88% of the citizens attend a religious service at least once a month. That compares to 55% of the US population. One former communist country, Poland, has higher church attendance than the US with 74%. (*Your Church,* August, 2001).

## BROTHERHOOD NEWS

– Mark Hudson

**MORGANTON, NC...** The opportunity for Christians to teach English in the developing nation of China is not well known. Students there are taught English grammar, but schools and universities are begging American high school and college graduates to provide instruction and experience in conversational English. ***Bennie Mullins,*** a church elder in Spanish Fort, AL, has been involved in recruitment and placement of teachers for several years. Teachers are contracted for one year (or half year) to provide 16 contact hours of instruction. For that, they are provided housing, a livable salary, vacation and travel benefits. Three North Carolinians are going for the next school term. ***Tony and Janet Forrest,*** a part of the Morganton church for the past 19 years, will be part of this adventure. Janet has retired after 34 years of teaching elementary school and Tony has resigned his ministry to the Morganton church. They will leave August 23, 2001, for a ten month tour of China. They will be located on the law campus of the Zhongnan University of Economics and Law in Wuhan, Hubel Province, China. Also, after their marriage, ***Molly McCoy*** of Hickory, NC, and ***Michael Plyler*** of Mt. Pleasant, AL, will teach English at Wuhan Finance College. This couple are both recent graduates of Freed Hardeman University in Henderson, TN. Both couples see this as a great opportunity for personal adventure while being able to make an enduring impact upon the future of China by teaching its rising leaders.

**MOCKSVILLE, NC...** The annual *Carolina Men's Leadership Retreat* will be hosted at the Carolina Bible Camp and Retreat Center November 2-3, 2001. This year's speaker will be ***Dr. Carroll Osburne*** of Abilene Christian University. For additional information contact Kent Massey at the Providence Rd. Church of Christ.

**RALEIGH, NC...** The ***Brooks Ave. Church of Christ*** will be hosting its annual *Mid–Atlantic Evangelism Seminar* September 21-23, 2001. The theme this year is "The Anchor Holds." Among the speakers will be ***Rick Atchley, Ross Thomson*** and ***Ruby Howard.*** The worship leader will be ***Keith Lancaster.***

# Pray More and Dispute Less

**Randy Gore**

As I write, I am just off the heels of taking a history course on the Restoration Movement. If you are fairly new to the church of Christ and wonder what that means, put simply, it is the history of the church's roots and development in America over the last 200 years or so. While our religion, teachings, and understanding of God need to come from the Bible, this was a helpful study to me to show how some very spiritual people, who came many years before any of us, studied and worked so hard to help us be where we are religiously and spiritually today.

I must admit, this was a required course for my program and I was not too terribly excited about taking it. I typically am more interested in courses on the Bible text and have never been one to use Restoration Movement history very much in my teaching and preaching. Actually, I have kind of avoided using it in my hope not to be influenced by anything other than the Bible in terms of doctrine and beliefs. So, even writing this article is a stretch for me. However, God does work in various ways and I gained a greater appreciation and admiration for these great Christians in American history. It also helps to see how mistakes have been made in the church (before the Restoration Movement and during it), how unspiritual and outside forces have harmed the Lord's cause over the last 200 years, and how attitudes and doctrines can develop to take our focus off of what really matters. As with any study of history, there are successes that we should learn that would be beneficial to keep and repeat, and there are mistakes/failures that we should learn to never repeat again.

One of our great forefathers in the American church was Barton W. Stone; what a Sprit–filled man! As I went through this course, I strangely felt an admiration for this man as if he and I lived during the same time. I somehow connected with him as I read about the struggles that he went through to find truth and the stands he was willing to take, along with the ostracizing that came with it, when others just did not understand. I greatly appreciated the humble attitude that he seemed to have when others (inside and outside the church of Christ) disagreed with him and when some even treated him as an outcast. This is a brother that I would have loved to meet and fellowship with (and I plan to one day!). Stone became disenchanted with the trappings he found as a minister in a particular denomination and had a desire to return to the Bible for his teachings which eventually meant to change some of his beliefs and teachings (are you willing to do that?). His desire to follow the Word of God and to let God work how God chooses got him into trouble with His religious superiors. In 1801 Stone was preaching in Cane Ridge, Kentucky where, what has been called, the Greatest Revival in American History took place. This was the largest and most famous camp meeting revival in American history (and it is the event that catapulted the movement of undenominational Christianity that we are part of in churches of Christ today). Stone started a series of preaching and hosted a communion service in Cane Ridge that kept drawing other preachers and listeners. The revival lasted for days as people continued coming as they heard about it. Once the Lord started working in the large gathering, the preaching schedule (if there ever was one to begin with) was thrown out the window. Various preachers stood up at different spots, often using tree stumps as podiums, as crowds gathered around to listen. Estimates are that 20,000-30,000 people attended coming and going at

> *"Prayer will change our hearts and bring us closer to God."*

various times. While this crowd may not seem huge compared to something like a Billy Graham Crusade that fills a football stadium, keep in mind that this was 1801, there were no cars or planes, and that Cane Ridge, Kentucky was basically out in the middle of nowhere. Actually, some historians think the revival finally ended when there was no more grass in the area for participant's horses to eat so they had to go home.

When the revival did finally end, Stone was in trouble with his religious overseers. The revival was attended and even partly conducted by members and preachers of various denominations. It had been quite unorthodox from what many people were used to and the message was preached that the Gospel and salvation is for all (rather than a few elect people as Stone's religion had taught). However, Stone did the will of God and let God work how He wanted to work. The Cane Ridge Revival did not fit into his religion's box or system and Stone was willing to give that up to serve God in a better way. He humbly left the religion and ministry that he was ordained in, continued his studies and work to be a Christian as found in the New Testament, and churches of Christ eventually spread across the American frontier.

Stone was a great example as a Christian, but he did not have all the right answers and I think he would be the first one to admit that. However, Stone did have what is needed to be a Christ-like disciple of the Savior: humility. We are urged to have this attitude as Paul wrote, Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant (Philippians 2:5-7).

Now, having given all this history about Stone, I did so to basically make one point that Stone taught and lived. Stone said that we as Christians should pray more and dispute less. Since all of us are at different points in our faith, and none of us ever have all the same conclusions about every biblical question, we are obviously not going to always agree. Also, from a practical standpoint, we often find ourselves not agreeing on even typical every day things with our friends, families, and co-workers. Stone's urging to pray more and dispute less will greatly change our lives if we take this principle to heart. The example is seen in our Savior's life as he was deeply involved in prayer for unity among His followers before He died (John 17). Perhaps if various people in our movement would have remembered Stone's, and more importantly Christ's words about prayer, we may not have had so much division in the church or in our families and other relationships over the last 200, and even 2000, years. God never told us to dispute with everyone that we disagree with. He did, however, teach us to pray and to be humble. Prayer will change our hearts and bring us closer to God and to one another much quicker and more effectively than disputing ever will.

Stone had a great desire for unity to exist among Christ's people. This desire led him to the wisdom of praying rather than fighting with his fellow Christian brothers, which gave him the reputation of being humble and spiritual. He was even described by one brother this way: A man more devoted to Christianity, has not lived nor died, and many stars will adorn his crown in a coming day. What a way to be known! So, let's listen and practice those words from yesteryear that Brother Stone taught ***pray more and dispute less.*** Maybe we too will develop the attitude and display the example that he had as we seek to be effective for Jesus.

---

*Randy is a graduate student at Lipscomb University in Nashville, TN. He can be contacted at RNGore@juno.com.*

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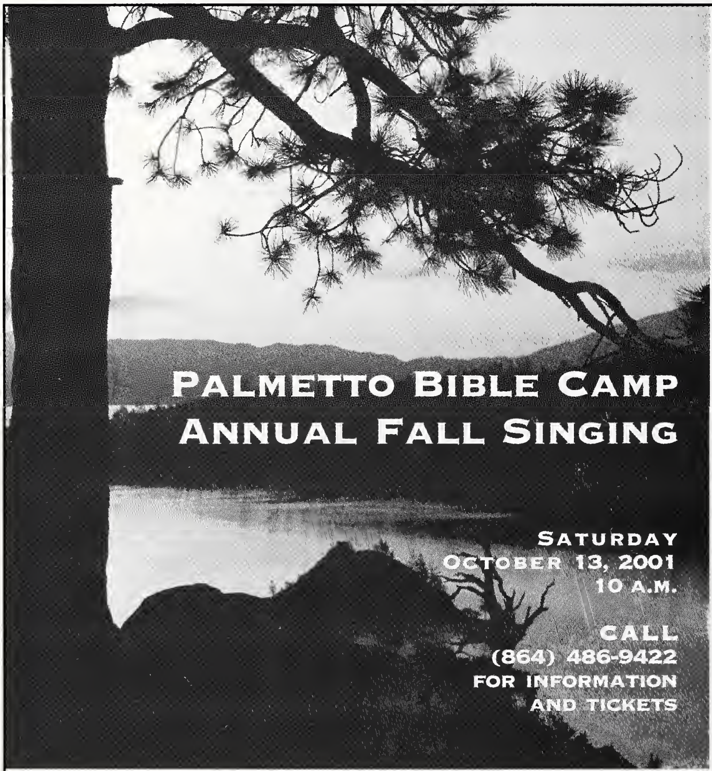

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VOL. 43 NO. 5 SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2001

# CAROLINA christian

“Holy God, Holy People: Study in Leviticus.”

# CAROLINA christian

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# September 11, 2001

**Dennis Conner**

As I sit down to write, the images of planes crashing into the twin towers of the World Trade Center are still being replayed in my mind, just as they are now carved indelibly into the American psyche. Millions of words have been uttered and written in response to the unimaginable, even though there are no words in human language that can adequately describe the horror of that event. We are justifiably angered and shocked at the great injustice that has been done to our nation and our people.

However, let us not think for a moment that we are the only victims of a madman terrorist and an oppressive regime in Afghanistan. There, an entire nation has been made to suffer, living in squalor and fear. And around the world thousands upon thousands continually die needlessly and senselessly at the hands of the wicked. Let us grieve for them as well, and be outraged at the injustice. Further, let us include in our prayers *all* those who suffer at the hands of the wicked. And when human words fail to express the depth of our feelings, let us remember the words of the psalmists who cry out to a God who hates injustice and wickedness.

*"Arise, O LORD!*
*Deliver me, O my God!*
*For you have struck all my enemies*
*on the jaw;*
*you have broken the teeth*
*of the wicked.*
*From the LORD comes deliverance.*
*May your blessing be on your people."*
*(Psalm 3:7-8)*

*"Arise, LORD! Lift up your hand,*
*O God.*
*Do not forget the helpless.*
*Why does the wicked man revile God?*
*Why does he say to himself,*
*'Hw won't call my to account'?*
*But you, O God, do see trouble*
*and grief;*
*you consider it to take it in hand.*
*The victim commits himself to you;*
*you are the helper of the fatherless.*
*Break the arm of the wicked*
*and evil man;*
*call him to account for his wickedness*
*that would not be found out...*
*You hear, O LORD, the desire*
*of the afflicted;*
*you encourage them, and you listen*
*to their cry,*
*defending the fatherless*

*and the oppressed,*
*in order that man, who is of the*
*earth, may terrify no more."*
*(Psalm 10:12-15, 17-18)*

*"The LORD is my light*
*and my salvation—*
*whom shall I fear?*
*The LORD is the stronghold*
*of my life—*
*of whom shall I be afraid?*
*When evil men advance against me*
*to devour my flesh,*
*when my enemies and my foes*
*attack me,*
*they will stumble and fall.*
*Though an army besiege me,*
*my heart will not fear,*
*though war break out against me,*
*even then will I be confident.*
*One thing I ask of the LORD,*
*this is what I seek:*
*that I may dwell in the house*
*of the LORD*
*all the days of my life..."*
*(Psalm 27:1-4a)*

*"God is our refuge and strength,*
*an ever present help in trouble.*
*Therefore we will not fear, though*
*the earth give way*
*and the mountains fall into the heart*
*of the sea,*
*though its waters roar and foam*
*and the mountains quake*
*with their surging...*
*The LORD Almighty is with us;*
*the God of Jacob is our fortress."*
*(Psalm 46:1-3, 7)*

*"Rescue me, O LORD,*
*from evil men;*
*protect me from men of violence,*
*who devise evil plans in their hearts*
*and stir up war every day...*
*Keep me, O LORD, from the hands*
*of the wicked;*
*protect me from men of violence*
*who plan to trip my feet...*
*I know that the LORD secures justice*
*for the poor*
*and upholds the cause of the needy.*
*Surely the righteous will praise*
*your name*
*and the upright will live*
*before you."*
*(Psalm 140:1-2, 4, 12-13)*

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# Mature Christianity

**Ron Newberry**

Aren't babies adorable? It's so much fun to watch them blow bubbles and coo. It's fascinating to watch them smile for the first time and hear them speak their first word. I love to watch as they discover the world around them and how new everything is every day. They take such delight in the simplest pleasures.

Parents know that there is a period of time in which they will have to change diapers, clean up spills, bandage boo–boos, and provide a safe environment until their children begin to mature. But wouldn't it be sad if they never grew up?

I remember when our girls were small we marveled at each new stage of development. We read the books that told us when they should be expected to roll over, crawl, sit up, walk, etc. If our children are a little later than "normal" we are concerned, aren't we? Since all children develop at their own rate and maturation is not the same pace for every child, we don't get too upset if progress is off by a few weeks or even months. However, how sad it would be if they stayed infants both physically and emotionally. How tragic it would be if at age ten a child was still wearing a diaper. How distressing it would be if at age thirteen they were still two years old emotionally.

We seem to have forgotten the parallel between physical and emotional maturity, and spiritual maturity. It is both normal and essential for a healthy Christian. Unfortunately, we interact with Christians frequently who are several years old in Christ and yet they still need diapers changed, spills cleaned up and they haven't learned to crawl, much less walk. They still throw temper tantrums when they don't get their way. They exhibit thumb–sucking behavior acceptable in an infant, but not in a mature person.

Twice in 1 Corinthians Paul notes that the Corinthian brethren were still infants. He wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:1, "Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants inChrist." Then in 1 Corinthians 14:20 he said, "Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults."

Two things are notable in these two texts. For one thing, infantile behavior is worldly, unspiritual behavior. Second, we are expected at some point to stop thinking as infants and start thinking like adults.

What does adult behavior growing out of an adult attitude look like? For one thing, adult Christians don't insist that everything revolve around them. They don't have to be the center of attention. They don' overreact when they are told "no." Adults understand compromise in opinions and they manage to control their temper.

In addition, mature Christians think for themselves. They don't wait to see what someone else thinks and then merely chime in with their vote of approval. They are critical thinkers. Even when adults differ on some issue, they discuss the merits of each side as opposed to shouting and calling names. Adult Christians can separate the issues from the person involved.

Yes, babies are cute, cuddly and adorable. Baby Christians are also wonderful. However, we expect both to grow up and grow out of some childish habits. If babies of either type continue to exhibit infantile behavior long after they should have put childish things behind, long after they should no long be thinking as a child, long after they should no longer be talking like a child, then we know something is seriously wrong. We all need to continue to mature. To that end, I think it would do us all a lot of good to pause occasionally and check our immaturity quotient.

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# Why Leviticus?

**Paul Watson**

*Editor's Note: Our theme for this issue is "Leviticus: Holy God, Holy People." An easily overlooked book, Leviticus actually speaks powerfully and relevantly to the Christian's life today. In this issue of* ***Carolina Christian*** *we have attempted to demonstrate the importance of Leviticus for understanding who we are as the people of God today. Hopefully, prayerfully, God will use these articles to enrich your understanding of and appreciation for this often neglected portion of Scripture.*

Along with Obadiah, Song of Songs, and 1–2 Chronicles, Leviticus is surely one of the least-read books of the Old Testament. It is not hard to understand why. Most of the topics taken up in Leviticus are either foreign to us (e.g., sacrifice) or are viewed differently by us today (e.g., skin blemishes, which are now treated by dermatologists, not ministers). Much of the language of Leviticus is technical, detailed, and not very appealing—as, for example, this portion of the instructions for the sin offering in Leviticus 4:8–12:

"He [the priest] shall remove all the fat from the bull of the sin offering—the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them, both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys—just as the fat is removed from the cow sacrificed as a fellowship offering. Then the priest shall burn them on the altar of burnt offering. But the hid of the bull and all its flesh, as well as the head and legs, the inner parts and offal—that is, all the rest of the bull—he must take outside the camp to a place ceremonially clean, where the ashes are thrown, and burn it in a wood fire on the ash pile."

The principal characters in Leviticus are the priests—indeed, one of the book's designations in the synagogue is that of "The Priests' Manual"—and priests are generally off theradar screen of our personal experience. Perhaps my own earliest childhood memory is that of going, as a three-year-old, with my father to a Catholic hospital to visit my mother and newly born sister. We shared with a priest and two nuns, and I became so frightened of their ominous garb that I buried my face in my father's pant leg to hide from them.

So for most of us, myself included, Leviticus will be an acquired, not a natural, taste—but it is one well worth acquiring. The following articles in this issue will help us develop a sensitivity to and an appreciation of the gifts that Leviticus has to offer. In this brief introduction, let me focus on three such gifts, the first of which is the concept of holiness. "Holy" or "holiness" occurs over 150 times in Leviticus. Recall that God's promise to the Israelites when they first arrived at Sinai was that if the people accepted the covenant that God was about to offer them, they would be for him "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). Leviticus spells out what being "a holy nation" entailed. I like to think of Leviticus 19:1–2 as the golden text of the book: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them, 'Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.'"

In all the extended, minute instructions about holiness, what shines through is the holiness—the absolute distinctiveness, the complete righteousness—of God. To be holy ourselves, as Leviticus 19:1–2 makes clear, is not to be pious or sinless but to be like our Father: "Here [in Leviticus 17–26] individuals are called to act, think, and live holy lives patterned after the norm established by the character of God" (Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Leviticus," *New Interpreter's Bible,* vol. 1 [Nashville: Abingdon, 1994], 997). Did not Jesus reaffirm this when he said, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48)? And note that the call to be holy went out, not to a few select individuals who had an unusual capacity for purity, but to "the entire assembly of Israel" (Leviticus 19:2). God intends for his people to be a holy community, not just holy individuals.

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A second gift from Leviticus is a holistic understanding of sacrifice. From all the details about sacrifice in Leviticus 1–7, three major categories of sacrifice emerge, with their common purpose being the (re)establishment or the enhancement of the worshiper's relationship with God. The thanksgiving sacrifices embodied the people's gratitude to God for his gracious, generous gifts to them. The "peace" offering that was really a fellowship or communion sacrifice was a shared meal—shared by the worshipers among themselves and shared, symbolically, with God. Sin offerings, and especially those made on the Day of Atonement, expressed a worshipers' sorrow for sin and deep desire for forgiveness, leading to a reconciliation with the God against whom they had sinned. All three of these sacrificial offerings took on a richer, fuller meaning in Christ. And, at his table each Lord's Day, we give thanks to God, have communion with God and with one another, and are reassured of the forgiveness of our sins through the body and blood of our Lord.

"God intends for his people to be a holy community, not just holy individuals."

Leviticus' third gift is that of continuity or integrity—showing how our lives are to be a seamless whole before God. Consider where Leviticus is positioned in the Pentateuch. Israel had been delivered from Egyptian slavery, had been led by God to Sinai to make covenant with him there, and had made all the necessary preparations for worship (the book of Exodus). Israel will shortly resume her God-directed journey to the promised land (the book of Numbers). But first, in Leviticus, the people of Israel and their worship leaders are given complete instructions as to how—and why—they were to worship God. Worship was thus given a central place in Israel's life, one that was connected both to where Israel has been and to where Israel was going. Similarly, the worship of each Israelite was to be seamlessly interwoven with all the rest of his/her life. This is especially clear in Leviticus 19, where religious instructions ("Do not turn to idols or make gods of cast metal for yourselves,"v 4), laws for personal morality ("Do not steal. Do not lie," v. 11), and regulations for interpersonal relationships ("Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself," v. 18) are all found on the same page. All of life is to be lived on that same page. "Sacred" and "secular"—as separate, distinct categories—are simply unknown in Leviticus. The God revealed in Leviticus made his will known for every nook and cranny, every time and season of his people's lives and said to them, "Keep all my decrees and all my laws and follow them. I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:37). And, for those who heard and responded, the God revealed in Leviticus made a promise:

"If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands...I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid...I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you...I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people. I am the Lord your God," (Lev 26:3a, 6a, 9, 12–13a).

---

*Paul Watson serves the Cole Mill Rd. church as elder and preacher. He can be contacted at 1617 Cole Mill Rd., Durham, NC 27705.*

## Aid For America

In the wake of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, DC, several relief efforts sponsored by churches of Christ are presently underway. Donations may be sent to any of the following:

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# Pleasing Sacrifices

**Dennis Conner**

Robert Deffenbaugh writes, "…The book of Leviticus has been the 'liver and onions' book of the Bible to me. That is, I know that it must be good for me, but I just don't seem to have a taste for the stuff. To others, the book of Leviticus is something like camping—they tried it once and that was enough to last them a lifetime." To be sure, for most of us Leviticus is not the most exciting book in the Bible, what with all the blood and rules. It is difficult for most today to find any relevance in a time and culture so far removed from our own. The truth, however, is that Leviticus deals with two of the most relevant of all questions: how can a sinner ever dare to approach a holy God, and then, having done so, how can he continue to live in communion with God? In this article we wish to consider the first question. Indeed, how can a sinner ever hope to enter into the presence of the holy God? The answer: through an acceptable sacrifice (chapters 1-7).

The book opens with the briefest of introductions and immediately launches into an extended narrative about different kinds of sacrifices as a means of approach to God and how they are to be offered (chapters 1-7). There are basically three kinds of sacrifices: sin offering (which would include the whole burnt offering and the guilt offering), thank offering and peace offering.

The sin and peace offerings involved animal sacrifices. There were typically six steps involved in these sacrifices:

1. The worshiper brought his animal to the altar (it would be the best animal he could afford; the very notion of sacrifice implies the giving up of something of value).

2. He would then lay his hands on the head of the animal, probably as a symbol of the transference of sin.

3. The worshiper, not the priest, would kill the animal, symbolically acknowledging that his sin deserved death.

4. The priest would sprinkle or pour out the blood in the prescribed manner.

5. Parts of the animal, usually the internal fat, would be burned on the altar. In the case of a whole burnt offering (1:2-17), the entire animal would be burned.

6. The rest of the animal was disposed of. If a peace offering, it was eaten by the worshipers. If a sinor guilt offering, by the priest.

Thus, a powerful impression would be left with the worshipers that sin was a serious matter and necessitated the shedding of blood in order to be forgiven. As Christian worshipers would come to understand, the animal sacrifices had no real efficacy in themselves, but anticipated the doing and dying of Christ, the perfect sacrifice. In fact, New Testament writers would quote from Leviticus approximately 40 times with reference to the death of Christ and the life of holiness the believer is called to as a consequence.

"Indeed, how can a sinner ever hope to enter into the presence of the holy God?"

The sin offerings, naturally, were intended as signs of penitence and acknowledgment of guilt (1:2-17; 4:1-6:7). The whole burnt offering, in particular, was to be an atoning sacrifice (1:3-4), sheltering the believer from the penalty of sin that he deserved. In time, Christ would become the once and for all atoning sacrifice for human sin.

The peace offering (3:1-17), with the exception of the kidneys and fat, was eaten in the presence of God by the worshipers and the priests and was a sign of fellowship with God and with one another. Communion is the dominant theme of the peace offering.

The thank offering (chapter 2) was an offering of meal (or cereal), usually offered in conjunction with an animal sacrifice. It was a gift intended to express reverence, thanks and gratitude. The meal offering was made up of the finest and purest flour, oil, and frankincense and could be presented in a variety of ways (cooked or uncooked). It always included the "salt of the covenant," the sign of perpetual covenant unity between God and His people. It *excluded* leaven and honey because both were symbolic of corruption to the Hebrew mind. Part of the gift was placed on the altar to be burned and was called "its memorial portion." That is, it served as a call to God to remember His covenant people.

Interestingly, elements of each of these sacrifices can be found in the language employed by New Testament writers as they speak of the Christian lifestyle. For instance, Paul writes in Romans 12:1, "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." In the Levitical sacrifices, it is the worshiper who does the offering. In Romans 12:1, the believer is called upon to offer something as well. In this case, it is himself or herself ("your bodies"). As mentioned earlier, inherent to the idea of "sacrifice" is the giving up of something of value. As Paul sees it, the thing of value to be sacrificed is one's own life, dedicated to the service of God. And while Paul speaks of it as a "living sacrifice," the essential element of death in the offering of a sacrifice is not to be missed, because in the Christian perspective one must first die in order to live.

Furthermore, the offering up of ourselves upon the altar of God is also a thank offering. The basis of Paul's appeal is the "mercies of God." That is, we are to offer ourselves in view of all that God has done for us and to us by His mercy; we offer ourselves in grateful response to His benevolent kindness toward us. And when in faith we offer ourselves to God in such a way, it becomes a "holy" sacrifice, having been forgiven, set apart and sanctified by God. Our sacrificed lives then become "acceptable" to God.

The familiar text of Hebrews 13:15-16 is another case in point, "Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." Again, the life of a Christian is described by the language of sacrifice. Praise is our gift to God as we call upon His name. Our good and compassionate deeds are viewed as "sacrifices" that are "pleasing to God,calling to mind the language typically used to describe the sacrifices of Leviticus as a "pleasing odor to the LORD."

So what does Leviticus, this "liver and onions" book of the Bible, have to do with me today? Well, perhaps as you can now see, just about everything.

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# Urgent Need!

# The Uncommon God

**Mark Banks**

*“I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy,” (Leviticus 11:45). “You must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the clean and the unclean,”* (Leviticus 10:10).

A couple of years ago when our congregation was on a reading–through–the–Bible track, the Sunday morning sermon would pick up a theme that had been read the week before. Paul Watson had been preaching on the soaring themes of creation and rescue from slavery from Genesis and Exodus. Then it was my turn to preach. I got Leviticus. Kidney fat and mildew. It was only after I forced myself to sit down and read the entire book that I began to have a real appreciation for the message of Leviticus.

The Israelites were learning of God’s great power and God’s relational love. They had been recently freed from the tyranny of Egypt and had become God’s covenant partner. They were beginning to learn that God was holy, that theirs was an uncommon God. But the significance of God’s holiness—and the implications of that holiness for Israel’s thinking and behavior—proved to be more difficult for them to understand.

Holiness is still difficult to understand or to appreciate. Contemporary culture has taken over certain “faith words” for descriptive purposes. For example, a dessert can be *tempting, divine,* or *sinfully* good. But hardly anyone claims the word *holy* (except for Batman’s sidekick, Robin). Even Christians tend to be a bit uneasy with holiness. After all, we are just common folks, aren’t we? And holiness tends to be, well, *un*common. Try to imagine a congregation receiving a resumé from a prospective preacher who describes himself as “a good Bible student, able to relate to all ages, evangelistic, and holy.” “This sounds a little over the top,” we would say. Or imagine a church sign that reads, “Come in and worship with us! Our God is holy—passionate and zealous in his covenant love. Rejected, he becomes a consuming fire!” “Honey, maybe we should drive on a little farther!”

Do we want a God who is holy, whose absolute purity, love and faithfulness accent our sinfulness? A God who requires us to change our lives and devote ourselves entirely to Him? Such a God would certainly make us uncomfortable.

Leviticus provides a crash course in holiness: some form of the word *holy* is found in Leviticus 150 times! We see that God the Savior was more interested in a covenant relationship with His people than in their creature comforts. And Israel *needed* a sense of God's holiness in order to be a true covenant partner with God, to be mediator of God's blessing to the nations around her. The Israelites had just demonstrated their failure to appreciate God's nature in the incident with the golden calf at Sinai; they had sought to approach their uncommon God in worship while mixing in their common passions. God had not been honored, and the worshipers had not been changed; their worship had not been holy.

Two narrative sections in Leviticus (10:1-11; 24:10-23) demonstrate how deadly—literally—it could be to adopt an *I just can't take God too seriously* attitude. But more than loss of life was at stake.The community of faith could—and still can—lose its sense of awe of the transcendent God. It could—and still can—become dulled and disordered, losing its higher passions and dignity. The detailed laws in the book of Leviticus were timely for Israel. The people needed a concrete order given by God that would fully match (or even overmatch) the general disorder that characterized their lives and threatened their relationship with Him.

We can imagine other practical benefits for the Israelites as they observed the laws in Leviticus. Consider the dietary and purity laws. It would not surprise us if our gracious God, who desires well–being for His people, had been concerned about their hygiene and health. However, the text does not name health and hygiene as reasons for the giving of these laws. Besides, some of the specific laws remain baffling to us. For example, I'm puzzled why the Israelites could eat a carp but not a catfish! What *is* made clear in the book of Leviticus is that through careful observance of the laws of God, Israel could learn that their God was holy. God in His purity was different from them and from all pagan Gods. And God's people could learn that in serving Him it was necessary to live and worship differently than their pagan neighbors. Thus, as Israel practiced sacrificial rituals, attended to the purity laws, and kept kosher, *they would be reminded at every turn that they needed to give uncommon attention to living in relationship with their uncommon God.*

The church, like Israel, is called to serve the Holy One, to give uncommon attention to living in relationship with Him. I suggest two emphases found in Leviticus that are especially significant for Christians today.

First, *God's people are to give themselves over to worship of God.* This means that we give God our best in genuine worship. Several years ago when I was in India, I met with a jeweler to buy something for my wife, Susan. The jeweler assured me that the ruby that had caught my eye was "of the highest quality." After I returned to the States, I discovered that my prized jewel was not genuine; it was just red glass. Not only was I disappointed, I took it personally. The heweler in India had feigned real concern for me and had used me. God takes our worship personally. While in some ways the shape of our worship differs from that of Israel, the emphasis on giving no less than our best remains. Indeed, we offer our very selves to God. But self–offering is not the goal of worship. The goal, rather, is to bring joy and honor to our holy God, to please Him. Of course, there is joy for us when we offer worship. As loved children of the Father, we can approach Him without terror and worship Him in reverent gladness.

And note that reverence is not equated exclusively with silence. Worship that is reverent can include both quietness before God and loud, expressive praise (Leviticus 9:23-24). God has always wanted a people who would give themselves over to worshiping Him; those who would worship Him in spirit and truth.

Second, *God's people are to reflect God's holy nature.* What does that mean? First and foremost, it means that we live in love. To be holy means that we respect others, that we carefully love them as we love ourselves (Leviticus 19: 18, 34). It means that we help the poor (Leviticus 19:9-10). And it means that we honor God's purposes for sexual relations (Leviticus 19:20).

Why love in this way? A common answer is that it makes for a healthier and more meaningful way of life. But more importantly, we do it because our God has a passion for people. The holiness of God was demonstrated supremely in the passion of Jesus *for us.*

Can we love in this way? Yes, but only by God's enabling grace. He makes us holy. We are forgiven by the offering of Jesus and we are empowered to love by His Spirit. "It is because of him that youare in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is our righteousness, holiness and redemption," (1 Corinthians 1:30). He envelopes us in His dazzling love and transforms us into a holy people who reflect His glory (2 Corinthians 3:18).

God is uncommon—absolute in purity, love and faithfulness. God is uncommon—*holy.* And God calls His people to be holy. That is the message of Leviticus.

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*Mark Banks serves the Cole Mill Rd. Church of Christ in Durham, NC as Outreach, Involvement and Youth minister. He can be contacted at 1617 Cole Mill Rd., Durham, NC 27705.*

# A Kingdom of Priests

**Geoffrey Sikes**

It had been three months since the children of Israel had been set free from Egyptian bondage. They had crossed the Red Sea in obtaining their freedom, had been fed bread from heaven, and had seen water come from a rock. Now they found themselves at the foot of Mount Sinai, and God was preparing to deliver His law through Moses. However, before revealing that law, God gave Moses a preliminary word for the people. Through Moses, He told them, "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a *kingdom of priests* and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5-6a).

Shortly after those words were spoken, Moses went up onto the mountain and received a number of instructions from God. Chapters 25-31 of Exodus deal specifically with instructions God delivered concerning the construction of the tabernacle and priestly service surrounding that structure. The entire twenty-eighth chapter of Exodus lays out specific details of the clothing priests were to wear, and the following chapter deals with the consecration of the priests themselves.

If Exodus helps to lay the foundation for the priesthood, then Leviticus begins to build the house. The book is filled with one regulation after another. There are laws concerning various offerings and feasts, dietary and health regulations, rules concerning property, and a myriad of other matters. Over and over, throughout the book, Aaron and his sons (the first priests) are told to instruct the people concerning God's laws. One-third of the way through the book (in Leviticus 9), the priestly ministry officially begins with a ceremony of sacrifice which concludes with the fire of God consuming a burnt offering and with all the people shouting and falling on their faces (Leviticus 9:23-24).

Modern day Bible students might not be all that inclined to engage in a detailed study of Leviticus (if indeed, they study the book at all). Some may see it as a tedious list of rules and regulations concerning a system which is no longer binding. After all, at the cross, Jesus "wiped out the handwriting of requirements" contained in the law of Moses (Colossians 2:14). However, although the specific laws contained in Leviticus may not apply to Christians today, there is a connection which should not be ignored between the thrust of that book and the Christian system. That connection, of course, is the emphasis on the priesthood.

Under the Old Testament system, priests came from the tribe of Levi, beginning with Aaron (Moses' brother) and Aaron's sons. However, as was seen in Exodus 19, God's plan was that eventually, all His people would serve as an entire "kingdom of priests." The apostle Peter emphasized this fact in language that was reminiscent of that found in the nineteenth chapter of Exodus. In I Peter 2:5, he told his readers that "you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a *holy priesthood,* to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ Jesus." Four verses later, he told them, "You are a chosen generation, a *royal priesthood,* a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (I Peter 2:9).

Throughout the book of Leviticus, there was an emphasis on the exclusivity of priests and their holiness, and there was a great amount of attention to the details involved in carrying out their priestly functions. While the New Testament has superseded the Old, we are still under a priestly system today, although, of course, some of the particulars have changed. Since all believers are called to be priests, obviously the calling is not limited to one particular family or sex. As Paul told the Galatians, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Additionally, the sacrifice which God is calling for today is neither animal nor grain, but one of giving ourselves completely to Him as "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God" (Romans 12:1).

However, in light of all the attention to detail in the book of Leviticus concerning the qualifications and ordination of priests, we need to be reminded that God is still very serious about His priesthood. The priesthood of believers needs to give attention to what God says in His word, and above all, their lives need to be characterized by personal holiness. After all, we are called to not only serve, but to represent a holy God in the midst of an unholy world. Let's take seriously His desire that we be a kingdom of priests, and let's seek to carry out His will in every aspect of our lives.

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*Geoffrey Sikes preaches for the Madison Street Church of Christ in Clarksville, Tennessee, 523 Madison Street, Clarksville, TN 37040.*

# Grace Versus Truth

**Kent Massey**

What if this question was posed to you: "What is the one thing the church has to offer that the world cannot get anywhere else?" How would you answer?

Be careful what you say, because you don't have to be a Christian to have a heart for the disadvantaged, to build Habitat houses, clothe the naked or even give a meal to the hungry. Nor do you have to be a Christian to try to change social norms or bring about government reform. And there are other places where you can find good moral teaching.

I have two answers (even though I know the question only asked for one). I believe the things that the church has to offer that the world cannot get anywhere else are *grace* and *truth*. Though they may appear at first blush to be two different answers, I think they are more closely related than what one might think.

After all, where else can the world go to find grace? It's not in the supermarkets where the lines are long and tempers are short. You won't find it in the rush hour traffic jam where you aren't moving and suddenly somebody wants in. It's not in supply in poitics where the different party can't seem to wait to pounce on the latest moral failure of a public figure and thus claim the moral high ground.

And what about the truth? We live in a culture where truth is defined by what you personally feel is right. There are no absolutes (but are you absolutely sure about that?) and everything is okay as long as you feel like it is. Truth is a moving target with television shows and prime time programming attempting to set the social norms as to what is right and what is wrong.

The church is called to be a place where grace and truth are modeled and practiced. We follow theChrist who was called one "full of grace and truth." As His church and bearers of His name, we are called to live as He lived. But unfortunately, the one place where grace and truth should be abundant is sometimes the one place where it is most grudgingly given. A contributing factor to our inability to be graceful and truthful has been a failure to understand the close relationship between the two.

You cannot have truth without grace. In our efforts to stand for the truth people sometimes have been unintentionally wounded and hurt. Truth never calls for us to resort to mean–spiritedness in our stance because it must be tempered with grace. Some of the most mean–spirited, personal and hateful attacks historically have come from those who use the guise of making a stand for the truth. You cannot love the truth and hate your brothers. That is a mockery of grace. Peter addresses this when he says, "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply from the heart" (1 Peter 1:22). The word "mercy" appears three times in the book of Matthew, yet the context of those three times is when Jesus is in a discussion with those who were standing for the truth as they perceived it, but lacked mercy. This doesn't mean that we surrender truth, but it does mean that truth without grace is not truth.

Second, you cannot have grace without the truth. Grace does not mean that we practice an "anything goes" mentality and the politically correct tolerance so rampant in our society. That isn't grace because grace never gives people free reign to sin or ignore the clear directions of God's word. Truth is not a matter of personal taste because it issues from the very character of God. Truth calls us to make a stand about the sinfulness of our culture and be the salt and light that God intends. Truth means that we will not tolerate social injustice. It allows no room for racism or sexism. It cannot be silent when biblical standards (not personal opinions) are violated.

If we spent more time looking at the life of Jesus we could learn more about how to be grace and truth people. Jesus was able to retain the standard of truth, yet be gracious in the way that he dealt with people. He stood for truth, but he preached grace because grace is the measuring stick. "Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Give and it will be given to you a good measure pressed down, shaken together and it will be poured in your lap. For the measure you use, it will be measured to you," (Luke 6:37-38). It could be that we will learn to appreciate both grace and truth when we learn that you cannot have one without the other.

Victor Hugo's classic *Les Miserables* relates the story of grace and truth. The primary character is Jean Valjean, who is a former convict, imprisoned for twenty years because he stole a loaf of bread. In the story he is shown great kindness by a bishop. However, he chooses to repay the bishop's kindness by taking some of his silver and stealing away into the night. Valjean doesn't get far before being stopped by a constable who is suspicious of the vagabond carrying silver. While Valjean claims the silver was a gift, the constable doesn't believe it. He takes Valjean back to the bishop. Jean Valjean awaits the words that will return him to prison for the rest of his life, but his breath is taken away by

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what the bishop says next. “You are mistaken,” the bishop says to the constable. “Of course this silver was my gift.” Then he turns to Valjean and says, “You forgot the most valuable part. You forgot to take the candlesticks.”

Jean Valjean waits for the condemnation that he knows he deserves; but instead of getting just the truth he knows, he is blindsided by the grace he doesn’t know. One moment he faces prison and poverty, the next freedom and plenty. Before Valjean leaves, the bishop says to him, “You must never forget this moment. Your soul and your life have been bought back. You are not your own. From now on, you belong to God.”

The rest of Valjean’s life becomes an act of love. He honors the promise given to a dying prostitute and devotes his life to raising her daughter, Cosette. Later, he risks his life to save the life of the man Cosette loves, even though he knows it may mean living life alone.

On the other side of the story of Jean Valjean is a man committed to law: the constable, Jauvert. Jauvert is convinced of his own righteousness. He is the champion of morality and justice. He believes in many good things and is committed to truth. He wants wrongdoing stamped out and to have a society free from deceit, theft or corruption. Jauvert sincerely believes himself to be an agent of good and he spends his life seeking to recapture Jean Valjean.

Jauvert lives in world that is occupied only by truth with no grace. His blindness to his own need for grace causes his capacity for love and compassion to wither. So caught is he in the pursuit of truth that he becomes merciless in the process. The crisis of his life occurs when Jean Valjean risks his own life to save that of Jauvert, his relentless pursuer. But Jauvert cannot bring himself to receive grace. He despairs. And in the end he kills himself, rather than admit the truth: he needs grace as much as those he had been persecuting.

The church is made up of many kinds of folk. There are those (including me) who can be too critical, too judgmental, too hateful, and too cantankerous or too mean. But I have never heard of anyone being too truthful or too gracious. Well…maybe I have. His name is Jesus and He is the one I am supposed to be like. Jesus had situations where he had to stand for truth and offered grace. He could stand up for truth, yet he could also preach and practice grace. Grace is the measuring stick of how well we understand the truth.

Always remember that God will never ask you to give more grace than you have been given! Who needs grace in your world this week?

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# The Journey With Christ

**Mike Hinrichs**

The road held no surprises for the Lord. He had Jerusalem in His sights, and He knew what was coming. It would be extremely unpleasant, to say the least. It was no stroll in the park that was stretched out before Him but a genuine confrontation with all of the forces of evil. A cosmic encounter was on the horizon, and He would find Himself in the eye of the storm. He explained it to His followers. There was tremendous animosity in the other camp. Hostility originated with the devil himself, and he had gathered an army from every segment of society. From kings to commoners, they took their stand against the Christ. Jews and Gentiles locked arms to carry out the plan. The religious and the irreligious collaborated. Extreme violence would be their methodology, and death was their goal. Ugly? Unimaginably so. It was no shock to Him, and everyone in His party was warned.

It didn't help. Even though they had been cautioned, they still withered in the heat of the moment. As temperatures rose, they scattered until He was left alone. It was bad enough that all of the religious and civil authorities opposed Him, but the failure of His closest associates was even more horrifying to watch. He knew it would happen, but it still brings a shock. One of His inner circle sold Him out. Defection is tough to accept. Another collapsed at the challenge. "Nope, don't know Him." In increasingly emphatic words, the denial found its voice. Yes, The Lord knew about that one, too.

Soon, they were all gone. Jesus, however, was not knocked off course. He was aware in advance that it would be that way. He never swayed. He marched on.

The priests stirred up the mob that intimidated Pilate. He called the soldiers, and they nailed Him up.It's a gruesome scene. Between a couple of thieves, the Son of God hung in the midday darkness. Holy blood was spilled. It dripped down His agonizing brow. It stained His sinless hands. It came from His broken heart. The universe quaked. The sun blinked. And Jesus died. It was brutal. Then, it was done. The devil had seemingly seized control and accomplished the unthinkable. The pilgrimage had reached a violent conclusion.

Christ fixed his eyes on His destination, and nothing deterred Him. Hostile opposition didn't. Neither did the faltering, the failing or the fleeing. Traitors would not sidetrack Him. He had a work to accomplish, and nothing was going to stop Him. On the road to Jerusalem He knew how nasty is would get, but He also knew that His execution was not the end. There was a resurrection on the horizon. There might be a cross in His future, but there was also an empty tomb. Death would give way to life, and that would be the next chapter of this episode.

His invitation includes a journey down a similar road for those who choose to follow Him. It is a highway that includes lots of pitfalls and potholes. It challenges us with the high demands of holiness and discipleship. Excellence comes with a cost. The price is the pursuit of a life exactly like Christ lived. It's a tall order. It just might include a cross. Whether it does or not, the last word is always life, not death. The tomb is still empty, and that's proof of every Christian's unending hope. So let us all deny our selves, take up our crosses and follow him.

*Mike Hinrichs serves the Westside church in Rocky Mount, NC.*

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# Not Much Time!

**Russ Jurek**

This morning, I was reflecting on the summer as I began preparations to take my daughter back to college. I had the pleasure of having her work with me this summer as a youth intern. I thought about all the things we were able to do with and for our young people. We really had a great summer! But summer is over and here we are at the start of another school year. Then I remembered some things I wrote two years ago as my daughter prepared for her senior year of high school. Realizing that she is already in her second year of college reminded me again of how little time we really have. I thought I would share with you those thoughts of two years ago. Perhaps they will help you to keep things in perspective.

*"The school bell rang at 7:50 this morning to start another year of classes for our children. This year is not quite like the past years, however. It is a special year for our family because it is a year of beginnings and endings. This year will be the beginning year of high school for our son and the ending year for our daughter. I mentioned to my wife that only a year from now, our daughter will be going off to college. As I think about that prospect, I can't help but wonder where the time has gone. Seventeen years have been swallowed up in what now seems like weeks instead of years. Compared to the last seventeen, this one year seems to be so little time. I know the time will pass by quickly and I'll be writing about college before I know it. But what about the next year?*

Not much time! Not much time to get in all the rest of the instructions I want her to have before she goes off on her own. Not much time to laugh and cry about all the funny and sad things that have happened and will happen. Not much time to cram in all the special events of Senior year at school. Not much time for waiting up at night for her to arrive safely at home from work or a date. Not much time for lunches, walks, talks, devotionals, prayers, and all the other things that have been a part of our lives for seventeen years.

As I look back, I know the Lord has richly blessed our family. He has given us the opportunity to build strong relationships with Him and one another. Though we have not always succeeded, we have tried to make the best of every opportunity God has given us to grow strong relationships with our children, and to teach them His ways.

*Why am I telling you all this? Because I know that many of you reading this have children of your own. Your children may be young enough that you are still thinking, 'When are they going to be big enough to do this or that on their own?' You may still have 10, 14, or 17 years or so to spend* *with them before they are off on their own. You may be thinking you have plenty of time for that walk, talk, lunch, devotional, prayer time, ball throwing or whatever you have been putting off. Trust me, that time will be gone before you know it. I want to encourage you to try to make the very best of every opportunity you have because there's really not much time."*

"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord," (Ephesians 6:4).

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# BROTHERHOOD NEWS

– Mark Hudson

**CLEMSON, SC...**
The *Clemson church of Christ* is sponsoring a campus ministry at Clemson University known as the Christian Student Fellowship. The congregation has tripled in size since 1994, and the campus ministry has also grown. Students and future students may learn more by contacting *Philip Weatherford*, deacon for campus ministry at Clemson, at philnmelw@aol.com or 864-845-0896.

**ROCKY MOUNT, NC...**
*Mike Hinrichs* is the new minister for the *Westside church of Christ* in Rocky Mount. Mike started his work at Westside in August. He and his wife, Patty, previously served the Windsor Lake congregation in Columbia.

**AIKEN, SC...**
The *Aiken church of Christ* hosted *Russ Jurek* in his "One Another Parenting Seminar" on October 5 & 6.

**MORGANTON, NC...**
The *Morganton church of Christ* announced that *Jeff Lovitt* started serving as the congregation's preacher in July. Jeff's wife, Paula, is public sector coordinator and paralegal for the law firm of Roberts & Stevens in downtown Asheville, and the Lovitts have two teenage children, Drew and Hayley. After graduating from the Harding School of Biblical Studies in 1981, the Lovittsmoved to Rock Hill, South Carolina, where Jeff served four years as youth and college campus minister for the Charlotte Avenue Church of Christ. He has also served churches in Missouri and Oklahoma. In January, 1998, Jeff began his work with the Biltmore congregation in Asheville. In 1996 Jeff designed, copyrighted, and started marketing the educational game, *Babyopoly*, a teen pregnancy prevention tool which he sells across the US and which is part of the National 4H Clubs of America's national curriculum. In 1997, after being on the National Dean's List three years running and earning ACU's Excelling in Education Award, Jeff earned his bachelor of arts degree in Bible from Abilene Christian University's distance learning program.

**ROCK HILL, SC...**
The Fourth Annual Carolina Men's Fellowship will be hosted by the *Charlotte Ave. church of Christ* on Saturday, March 9, 2002. The Fellowship will be held at the Sullivan Middle School auditorium. Last year's attendance exceeded the capacity of the Charlotte Ave. church building. For information call (803) 327-7853, or E-mail the church office at: *charlcoc@flashlink.net.*

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# Love in Action

**David Kneip**

I don't know if any of you have ever had appendicitis, but it's not fun. An inflamed appendix hurts. VERY BADLY. The pain starts out as a general stomach ache, but as it moved down and to the right, it starts to sting more and more. Eventually, you don't want to eat, you don't want to move, and the only semi–comfortable way to get around is to walk bent over double at your waist like an older man. I was lucky enough to have mine removed on my eleventh birthday. Not much fun.

It does happen, though, and not long ago a girl out this direction had to head to the hospital with an appendicitis attack. A friend of mine is her youth minister and he got the call just as he was getting ready to hed out of town to visit family. After calling the preacher to let him know of the situation, he stopped by the hospital, thinking he'd just visit for a while and then head home. He'd actually been at the hospital just a couple of nights before with the same family (the mother was having chest pains), and so he didn't think it would be a big deal. He was good friends with the girl, and he figured they would be able to talk. What he didn't count on was that she was heavily sedated in order to try to knock out the pain until she could get into a room. Just him and her mother, talking.

Have you ever sat at the hospital for a long time with a friend or family member? You run out of things to say rather quickly. As the short visit turned into a several hour stay for my friend, he and the girl's mother talked about this and that, but eventually things turned uncomfortable for this young youth minister. What could he say while this mother was waiting for her precious daughter to go into surgery? The family has had a considerable number of health problems and they don't trust hospitals or doctors very much. Should he try to reassure her that everything would be all right, or just sit and pray? It was a hard time.

My friend hit on an idea, though. Not knowing much to say, and noticing the girl's hair was tangled up from her restless tossing and turning, he began to stroke her hair gently with his hand. Her hair would smooth out a little, and then she'd turn over and it would get tangled again. Consequently, my friend sat, stroking her hair, for about an hour. Nurses came and went, doctors stopped by, but my friend just kept on, hoping that somehow, in her sleep, his action would comfort her soul.

Eventually, she went into surgery,

everything went fine, and my friend went on home. After he got back, though, he talked with the mother and she told him a curious thing. Apparently, while they hadbeen prepping the girl for surgery, one of the nurses asked if my friend was the girl's husband! He laughed, startled at the oddity of the comment. After all, she was just a high–schooler and he is in his mid–twenties. But the mother continued, telling him that it was his gentleness with her that had elicited the question. She then thanked him for his time and concern, telling him that she had never seen a man be so gentle with her daughter.

As my friend and I talked about the incident, he had begun to understand why the nurse had asked about their relationship. He protested that it was nothing special, thinking he had merely done what he thought Jesus would do in the same situation. That said, he knew that the rest of the world does not often treat people in the ways that Jesus would. The world kicks people when they are down, or maybe at least would take advantage of them. Christians care for those folks, whether they are fellow Christians or not.

The apostle Paul once said something to his young friend Timothy that bears on this situation: "Do not speak harshly to an older man, but…as a father, to younger men as brothers, to older women as mothers, to younger women as sisters—with absolute purity," (1 Timothy 5:1-2). What would happen if we began to treat all people as though they were our mothers and fathers, our brothers and sisters? What would happen if, instead of complaining about how the adults at church, school and work are always trying to dampen our fun or tell us what to do, we honor them and obey when appropriate? What if, instead of competing with the others of our gender—in sports, school, looks, or relationships—we could try to take care of them in whatever way we could, in absolute purity?

I think my friend was unknowingly following Paul's teaching. My hope is that you will take this verse to heart so that, someday, when your child is lying in hospital bed and his or friends from church are surrounding the bed praying, singing, and maybe even showing gentleness, the nurses might ask who the people are. "Are they the husband or wife? Family members?" And you will say, "No, they're Christian brothers and sisters." And the nurse will understand because he or she has seen that kind of Christianity so many times before.

# South America Campaign

**Mark Hudson**

Eleven members of churches of Christ from South Carolina participated in a two–week mission trip to South America in August. Organizing the campaign was Billy McVey, minister for the church of Christ in Kingstree, South Carolina. He was joined by Fred Ady, preacher for the Georgetown church of Christ; Jody Evans of the Kingstree congregation; Craig Hinrichs and his son, Caleb, of Winnsboro; Mark Hudson, preacher from Aiken; Donald Klieves, and electrician who serves the West Columbia church of Christ as a deacon; Freddie McCray of Andrews; Joe Ockay, an accountant and elder for the West Columbia congregation; Raymond Pressley, preacher for the Haigler Street church in Abbeville; and Ernest Smith from Kingstree.

This year's mission was to establish a church in Apoera, Suriname. During last year's campaign a man from Apoera was baptized by the South Carolina mission team in Crabwood Creek, Guyana. Rudoff's wish was to have missionaries return to teach his village. Apoera is located along the river that separates Suriname and Guyana. The village is most easily accessible by boat. The trip overland from the capital city of Suriname would take two or three days during the rainy season. The mission team from South Carolina flew into Georgetown, Guyana, on August 2. They traveled by van east to the end of the road at Crabwood Creek and eight hours upriver on a tug that brings logs outof the rain forest.

*This work has a great potential for evangelizing the interior of Suriname and Guyana.*

Apoera is a village best described as a paradox. The village sits at the edge of the Amazon jungle. Cobbled streets, water and electric services were installed years ago by an American firm. Suriname, formerly Dutch Guyana, won its independence from the Netherlands. Following the revolution, the American business pulled out. The paved streets, a few houses, the power plant, and a fifty-two kilometer railroad into the rain forest were abandoned. Although the streets are cobbled, Apoera has only a few four–wheel drive pickups. Apoera and neighboring villages are now home to Amerindians (native American Indians). A subsistence living is earned through hunting game and harvesting jungle fruit. A few jobs are available in logging. Mail delivery to Apoera is almost nonexistent. The one police officer works a six week tour of duty in the village. The police station's radio battery was drained and the village would be isolated until a replacement came by boat. The electricity and water were turned on only a few hours each morning and evening until more fuel oil came by barge. Dutch is the official language of Suriname and is taught in grade school. Most residents, however, were literate in English and Dutch.

Forty-two attended the first night of the meeting. Although isolated at the edge of the jungle, those who attended the first night of the meeting represented seven countries on four continents. During the one week campaign, sixteen were baptized in Apoera. Freddie McCray went there with plans to stay for three months. He stayed behind to continue teaching and grounding this infant church. Billy McVey is coordinating other missionaries who will work in the village for several months at a time after Freddie's return to the States.

The second week of the August mission trip was spent in Crabwood Creek, Guyana. This campaign was a follow–up to previous mission trips. Eleven were baptized on this tour. Guyana is a former British colony and English is the official language. The Crabwood Creek church of Christ is growing. A large number converted on previous campaigns have remained faithful. Billy McVey has plans to establish an Evangelism Training School in Crabwood Creek. The church owns the meeting house that will also house visiting missionaries and Guyanese students. This work has a great potential for evangelizing the interior of Suriname and Guyana. Workers for future campaigns and instructors for the evangelism school are needed.

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*Mark Hudson is Brotherhood News editor for* ***Carolina Christian*** *and preaches for the Aiken church in Aiken, SC.*

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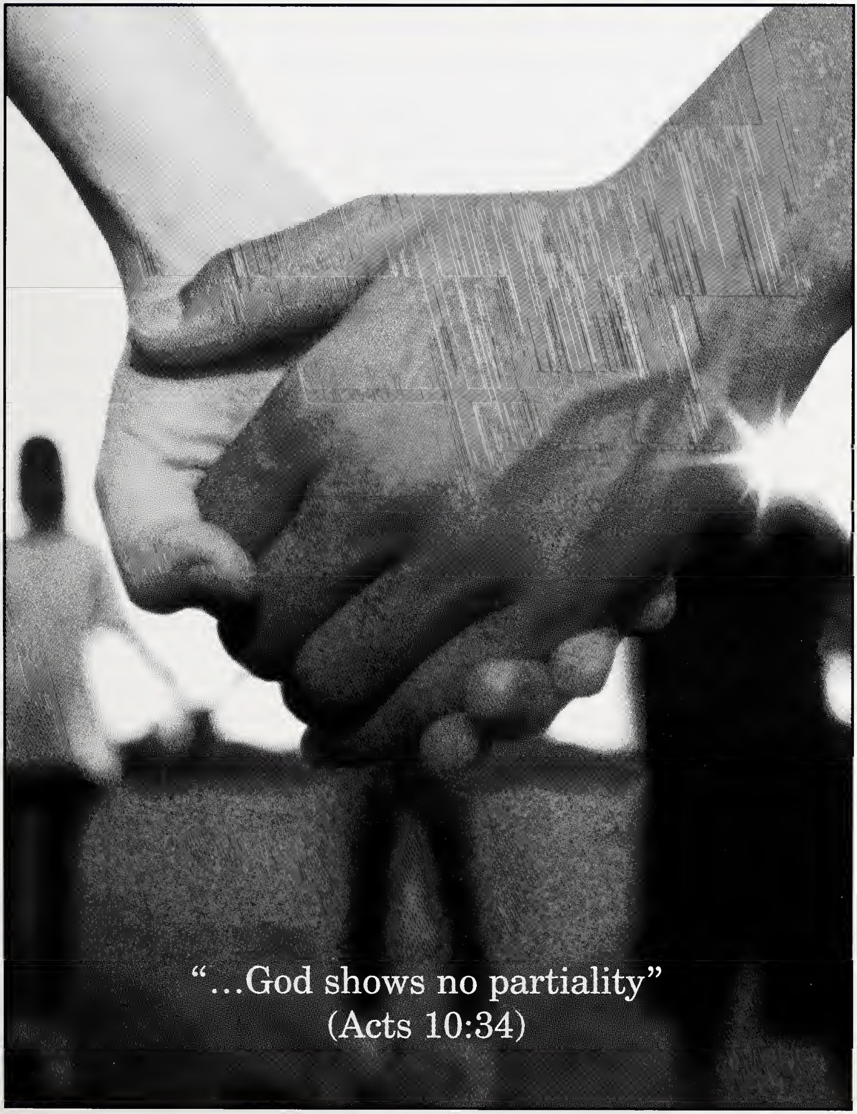
# CAROLINA christian



"...God shows no partiality"
(Acts 10:34)

# CAROLINA christian

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# The Church and Race Relations

**Dennis Conner**

The Sunday that falls closest to February 14 marks a little known day of national observance; it is National Race Relations Day. The purpose is to promote harmony among the races in our nation. The history of racial strife in America is painfully well–documented, and while we may find some satisfaction in the progress that has been made, the truth remains that we are nowhere near the end of the journey toward racial harmony.

Rather than being on the frontline of the battle for equality and tolerance during the civil rights battles of the 60's, churches then were more often than not bastions of prejudice and intolerance. In one sense, that is not surprising in that even the early church was hampered in its outreach by the prejudices of its cultural heritage. All that changed with the conversion of a pious Gentile believer named Cornelius, a conversion that forced the early church leaders to confront the barriers of their own closed hearts. Acts 10 and 11:1-18, where the story can be found, is still instructive for the church today.

In Acts 11 we find the apostle Peter relating to his Jewish brethren what God had done with the family of Cornelius. The church was concerned that Peter had gone beyond the acceptable boundaries of race in taking the gospel to a Gentile. That was radical, revolutionary, disturbing. It represented a change for which their cultural heritage had not prepared them. Peter responded to their concerns by relating his own experience of God's work not only in the conversion of Cornelius, but in the conversion of his own heart as well. Peter told the church of three successive works of God, each striking a hammer–blow to his own racial and religious prejudice.

The first work, in 11:4-10, was the strange vision God had given to Peter (see Acts 10:9-16). The vision was repeated three times and the message was clear: "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." The visions were then followed by God's clear command to go to Cornelius (v. 12). Then, Peter spoke of how God, through the undeniable signs of the outpouring of His Holy Spirit, confirmed the acceptance of the Gentiles (11:15-17). There had been a Gentile

Pentecost in Caesarea! The message from God was clear: He is no respecter of persons. The Jewish leaders could not dispute Peter's reasoning and were forced to confront their prejudices and redefine their perceptions of God's grace in the world.

From the story of the conversion of Cornelius and Peter's defense of the gospel emerges three vital truths that powerfully address attitudes in the modern church. First, we see the inclusiveness of the gospel of grace. The significance of the conversion of Cornelius and his household was that "God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life." In His grace, God has initiated a new society, a new kingdom, where the old distinctions and prejudices (and modern ones) no longer apply. In God's kingdom all the humanly erected barriers that keep us apart from one another and make us suspicious of one another are shattered and tossed upon the trash heap of human bigotry. And where God in His grace tears down all distinctions among races and peoples, we have no liberty to re-erect them. To do so is no less than sin.

"And where God in His grace tears down all distinctions among races and peoples, we have no liberty to re-erect them."

And as the early church would go on to demonstrate in numerous locales, it was not only that anybody could be saved; they could also worship together. Contrary to the advice of many contemporary church growth pundits that homogeneous outreach (like reaching out to like) is more conducive to growth, there were many churches in New Testament times that learned to reach beyond the social and racial barriers. Jews and Gentiles worshiped together (though not always without repercussions). They were one people, one community, worshiping the One God.

Second, God's leading, once determined, must be obeyed. No doubt Peter's first venture into Gentile territory was a bit awkward for him, but he understood that it was God's will and God's will was to be obeyed. The Jewish brethren in

Jerusalem were also uncomfortable with the implications of the gospel's success. However, by the time Peter finished his defense of the gospel's inclusiveness, they, too, understood that this was God's will and glorified Him.

Prejudice toward any group of people—Latino, African-American, Chinese, White, etc.— cannot be tolerated or sanctioned among the people of God. Whatever our rationalizations might be for such attitudes, they are just that, rationalizations. We might expect to find prejudice in the world, which lies in the grip of ignorance and darkness, but its presence among God's people is disobedient and sinful.

Third, God's grace is the great equalizer. The fact is, no one is better than anyone else. No race is superior, for we are all sinners. We stand together on the plain of human failure. Regardless of our racial identity, we have all fallen short of God's glory. Sin is an equal opportunity enslaver! Grace, on the other hand, is an equal opportunity emancipator. This wonderful truth is to be celebrated, not resisted.

The history of American churches of Christ with regard to race relations has not been particularly stellar. Rather then being an agent for holy change in a segregated society, the church's attitude and behavior was too often reflective of that society. Thankfully, great strides have been made. It is common for whites, African–Americans, and Spanish–speaking people to be found worshiping and serving God together. However, that is a far cry from saying that the fight for racial equality—in the church as well as society—is over. The church today, and tomorrow, must denounce all racial and social barriers, moving forward in the conviction that all people are created in the image of God. That singular truth makes us all brothers and sisters!

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# Baggage Overboard

**Ron Newberry**

As a child I read Jules Verne stories over and over. They provided a stimulation that stirred my imagination. One of my favorites was Mysterious Island.

Written in 1874 and set in the Civil War period, the novel tells the story of five prisoners who escaped from a prison camp by hijacking a hot–air balloon. Thinking only of their immediate escape they didn't stop to consider how to control the balloon. Before they knew it, they were being carried by the wind out over the ocean.

The horizon faded and they could only hope for a shift in the direction of the wind or their arrival at a new landmass. With the passing hours came the sinking of the balloon. There was no way to heat the air to cause the balloon to rise, so they had to lighten the load. All excess baggage had to go. Over went extra clothes, weapons and even shoes. Fortunately, the balloon began to rise.

However, before long the waves were lapping at the basket of their balloon again. They threw overboard their food. They rose again, only to descend one more time. Since there was nothing left to jettison, they tied the ropes together and held on as they cut the basket loose. As it fell away the balloon rose one more time, but they spotted land and managed to get to shore as the balloon lost altitude and crashed into the sea.

For most readers the story really begins there as they explore the mysterious island on which they have landed. As I read it as a child that was where I wanted to begin the story too. However, as I reflect on Jules Vernes's story, I wonder if he wasn't trying to tell us something else in this adventure.

Here were five men who escaped with their lives. They had with them those things we all consider important—food, clothing, protection. However, when their lives were at stake they were willing to part with their most precious possessions if it meant life…even the prospect of life. They were saved from the sea not because there were any great epic deeds of heroism performed. They were saved because they had decided they could live without the baggage.

We often talk about the baggage someone carries with them in life. By that we mean the past that has been stored which we drag around with us just adding dead weight to our lives. Whether it is sins or bad habits or poor

> "When we throw overboard the things of this world that weigh us down we can soar."

attitudes or something else that is holding us back and weighing us down, they need to be thrown overboard if we are going to survive. One of the heaviest of these bags is stuffed with the guilt that lingers even though we may have been forgiven. That, too, must be ejected so we can rise again.

One of my favorite texts is Isaiah 40:28-30. "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

When we throw overboard the things of this world that weigh us down we can soar. What do you need to throw overboard?

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# Staff Changes at Carolina Christian

With this issue a changing of the guard takes place. For the past six years, Amy Savage has served as our Design Editor. Working with extremely limited financial resources, Amy has brought a distinctive style to the appearance of the magazine. She has worked long and hard, never receiving a penny for her efforts on behalf of our readers. During her tenure with Carolina Christian, Amy's life has changed quite a bit. For one thing, she got married! She was Amy Love when she began her work with us (thanks, Kevin, for taking good care of her and encouraging her to keep on working with us). Then, she became a mom. As you can see, there are clearly other priorities in Amy's life now! Thanks, Amy, for everything you've done for Carolina Christian and its readers. And thanks for your friendship!

And now, meet our new Design Editor, Peyton Crump. Peyton and his wife, Amy, have been married for two and a half years. Both are graduates of East Carolina University in Greenville, NC, where Peyton currently works as a graphic designer/web developer for the technology department. Amy is a drafting teacher at JH Rose High School. They live in Greenville and worship with the Greenville Church of Christ.

We believe that God has richly blessed us with the talents of Amy Savage, and now Peyton Crump. Thanks to both of you for your willingness to use your talents to the glory of God.

# Curtis Donates Archives to Carolina Christian

Burl Curtis has collected every issue of Carolina Christian (originally Carolina Messenger of Truth) and recently has donated his entire collection, forty three years worth, to the Board of Directors. Brother Curtis served as the second editor of the magazine and now lives in Searcy, AR. The Board is deeply grateful, and indebted, to Burl Curtis for this remarkable gift.

## 2002 Singles Retreat

# "The Power of One"

Hosted by the Cole Mill Road Church of Christ Singles Committee

**When:** March 1,2 & 3.

**Where:** Carolina Bible Camp & Retreat Center, Mocksville, NC

**How Much:** The cost of the weekend is $10 per person.

**Featured Speaker:** Don Utley

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# Bring Them Up

**Russ Jurek**

I was sitting in the back of the auditorium one day during services. I couldn't help notice all the families with small children. I thanked the Lord for blessing our church family with the little ones. I watched as children used various means to keep themselves from being bored. I watched as the parents used several methods to keep the children quiet so they wouldn't disturb others in the assembly. I remembered back several years when our children were small and recalled how embarrassed we felt when ours were the cause of the disturbances. I remembered how hard Cindy tried to control our children while I was doing the preaching; the times I would ask her what she thought of the lesson only to hear her reply, "I didn't get to hear any of it because I was tussling with these kids." And you thought PKs were perfect!

I thought about some of the advice Cindy and I received from those who had "been there" and the help we got from those around us. Perhaps now I might pass some of those ideas on to you in the hope that they will help encourage you as you work to bring your children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

First, a small pocket Bible is great because it fits in the little hands of small children. Get them a little Bible that will be "theirs." Always encourage them to bring the Bible to worship. Even before they can read, turn the Bible to the proper page when a scripture is given and point to the words for them as they are being read. In doing so, you can follow along in the reading and they are being encouraged as well. Give them a song book and encourage them to sing the song out loud. They don't have to know the words or the tune but they will learn the concept of singing together with the church family. Remember, to you it may be just noise but to them it is beautiful music to the Lord. This will help them feel that worship is for them too. The time you spend doing this will give them plenty of good attention. If your child wants to color, get them bible story coloring books so they can learn of Bible people and events as they color the pictures. Ask them to color a picture about the Bible story that is being studied. Invest this time in teaching your children about God and pay attention to them. This takes a lot of work but can be done quietly, and it shows them they are important to you. If children are just given a bunch of toys (noisy ones at that) and then told to play quietly while you worship, they are probably getting the message that worship is only for big people. I discourage the use of Barbie dolls, trucks and especially marbles to entertain them while you worship. They quickly get the idea that whatever is going on up front has no significance to them at all. Be creative and help them participate in the worship service.

You may not get a lot out of the worship assemblies while your children are very young. You may even ask yourself what the point is in attending services at all until they are older and can behave. The problem with that thinking is, you miss the value in teaching good habits when they are young so they will already have them when they are older. By the way, if someone complains that the children are disturbing the worship service, show them this article and tell them you would appreciate their help in bringing up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

For those of us who have "been there," we can help those parents by sitting with them and lending a hand in their efforts. Be an encouragement and don't hinder the little children from getting to Jesus because they make noise in worship.

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# A Great Servant Goes Home

Our hearts were saddened upon receiving the news of the passing of one of God's great servants, Rudolph Winfred Senn, affectionately known as "Doc." Brother Senn went to be home with the Lord on December 5, 2001 after succumbing to heart failure. Funeral services were held on Saturday, December 8, at the Palmetto Church of Christ, located at 7000 Nursery Road in Irmo.

Doc was born in West Columbia, SC on February 8, 1910, to John Jacob and Lilly Mae Senn. On May 20, 1933 he married Vera Cottrell. Doc attended Mt. Hebron Methodist Church until he became a member of the Pope Street Church of Christ in Columbia, SC when baptized by G. F. Gibbs. He worked in the shipyard at Wilmington, N.C., during World War II and was a member of the National Guard. Upon returning to West Columbia, Doc became very involved in church work and after raising his family, quit his secular job in 1964 to attended Freed–Hardeman College in Henderson, TN, to prepare for the ministry. After two years of concentrated Bible Study and preparation, Doc and Vera moved to Lancaster, SC and began a six and a half year ministry with the church there. While in Lancaster the Senns helped found a state home for troubled teenage girls, which was operated by the Duke Foundation. There they served as house parents for a time. "R.W.," as he was also called, and Vera then moved to serve the Church of Christ in St. George for three and a half years. He retired from the preaching in 1977 and returned to his home in West Columbia. Upon their return, Doc and Vera once again became very involved in the St. Andrews Road Church of Christ, where Doc served as an elder for over 20 years. Brother Senn served on the original Board of Directors of the Southeastern Children's Home, the Palmetto Bible Camp, and was a chaplain for the West Columbia/Cayce Ruritan Club. A cottage was named in honor of Doc and Vera at the Duncan campus of the Southeastern Children's Home, for which he was treasurer for many years.

At the time of his death brother Senn was an active member of the Palmetto Church of Christ. His influence upon churches of Christ in South Carolina is immeasurable and he was unquestionably one of the most respected men in the church in the last half of the twentieth century. Surviving are his wife, Vera Cottrell Senn of West Columbia; sons and daughters-in-law, Jerry C. and Brenda Senn of Hendersonville, NC, David J. and Peggy Senn of Madison, TN, Ann Senn of Rossville, GA, and a sister, Addie Mae Millender of St. Matthews; brother and sister-in-law, Clifton and Pat Senn of West Columbia; devoted niece, whom he and Vera raised as their daughter, Betty C. Eubanks and her husband Charlie; nephew, Jack E. Cottrell; 13 grandchildren, 20 great grandchildren, and 1 great great grandchild. Brother Senn was predeceased by a son, John Rudolph (Rudy) Senn. Memorials can be sent to the Southeastern Children's Home at 155 Children's Way, P.O. Box 339, Duncan, SC, 29334.

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# Madness

**David Kneip**

I have to admit it, guys: My name is David, and I'm a huge basketball fan. College basketball, really, more than anything else. There's just something about school spirit, painted faces, fans that live and die with their teams that the professionals can't capture at 100 bucks a seat. It doesn't help me that I went to Duke, and so I'm a Cameron Crazie. The sickness really does go down deep.

The worst part is this time of year, leading into the college national tournament. You've heard about it: March Madness, right? We sit, glued to televisions, struggling to maintain normal communication with the people around us, checking the Internet for scores of other games, choosing an underdog from Backwoods State for whom to root against the big boys. It's an insidious disease and every year it strikes.

It's important for me to tell you, my support group, that for me the disease was not congenital. I wasn't born with the Madness. I grew up in Texas, where we have problems with high school football (that's another story, though). No, my symptoms didn't start showing up until I moved to North Carolina for college, but when they did show up, it was bad. The strange thing is that since I've moved back to Texas, the Madness hasn't left. Apparently, I'm stuck with it.

All right, all right. I admit it. This has all been an elaborate set–up to talk about something other than basketball. You probably figured that out (although for some people, basketball really is close to religion). Seriously, though, have you ever felt that strongly about something? Have you ever been so consumed with a passion for someone or something that, in a given situation, you can't think of anything else to do? There are good and bad versions of this, you know. You can be so consumed with acquiring things, for instance, that if you see that a friend just got the new Playstation game, or the new N Sync CD, or the new Mustang GT, then you've got to go out and get one. And you'll run over anyone in your path to get it. Not so good. Or you might be at a time in your life when you're really committed to serving other people, so much so that you'll give up hang–out time with friends to engage in community service on one kind or another. While that can potentially bring problems, that's a much better kind of passion. Let me tell you about a third kind, one that I desire but struggle to maintain, probably just like you. That passion is a passion for trusting God. A guy named Paul wrote a great little book called "The Letter to the Philippians" in which he says this: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6). That's a good memory verse—you might already know it—but there's more there. Did you know that the language most ancient Christians spoke didn't have exclamation points? If you wanted to emphasize something, you usually had to repeat it a few times. That's why the gospel of Mark portrays Jesus as telling his disciples on three different occasions that he would have to die and that he would be raised: so they might have a better chance of getting it. Jesus didn't have neon signs. And neither did Paul. Let me paraphrase that little verse of Paul's: "I know there are problems in your life, but take everything, and I mean everything—your joys, your trouble, your pain, your grief, your thanksgiving—take everything to God in prayer." One great way to begin to trust God is to pray about things. I think Paul's right: everything has potential for prayer. The church at Philippi was going through trouble. People were fighting inside the church, and the people outside didn't look too kindly at the Christians. What does Paul say? You've got to trust God. If you want some corroboration for this, go read 1 and 2 Chronicles and the book of Isaiah. Same message, different time period. But what's the outcome? Verse 7: The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. I assume your life is not perfect. Your church might be fighting. Your family might be fighting. Your friends might be fighting. And whether you're the aggressor, the defender, or just plain stuck in the middle, you might feel like you're going crazy. Madness, right? But let me encourage you to trust in God, and to begin to do it by praying. Pray about little things at first, and soon you'll find yourself praying about big things. And before you know it, not only will you be trusting God, but there will be a little bit of peace somewhere in your life. Madness…passion…for trusting God.

# Wisdom is Peace-Loving

**Tom Torpy**

The Bible teaches us how to live our lives. It also teaches us how to evaluate or interpret the world round us.

Hold that thought, please.

Wisdom is perhaps the key virtue in the Old Testament. Three of the 39 books of the Old Testament are dedicated to the subject. The wise man is one who exhibits both proper understanding and proper behavior. He has understanding in that he knows the best way to live so as to achieve the desired outcomes of life—health, respect, wealth, familial well-being, long life, etc. He also lives consistently with the insight he possesses. He is not an objective observer of life like the philosopher of old, who, from his aloof societal position, critiqued human behavior by his own standard. The wise man is fully a successful participant in life.

Wisdom is the theme of James' writing in the New Testament. His epistle is much more than a "right strawy" epistle" as Luther referred to it. It is a book with substance. It may be the most challenging book in the New Testament. More like the Old Testament than any other book in the New Testament, James' epistle is about living rightly before God.

As a preliminary matter of credibility, let me mention that James was noted for his wisdom. He grew up in the household with Jesus (Matthew 13:55). Although he was understandably slow to believe that Jesus was the Christ (John 7:5), he was a believer who saw Jesus after his resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7). By the time of the 'Jerusalem Conference" (Acts 15), the Jerusalem brethren looked to James for leadership. The question of whether or not to require gentile converts to keep Jewish law or not was a major issue. After hearing from notables like Barnabas, Paul, and Peter, James spoke. He offered his recommendation and in so doing ended further discussion. James' word was final, and his recommendation was followed.

James offers a classic description of wisdom. It is similar to 1 Corinthians 13, which contains Paul's classic description of Christianity's premier virtue, agape. (Please read James 3:13-4:3)

Wisdom, according to James comes in two forms: a worldly wisdom and a heavenly one. Envy and selfish ambition characterize worldly wisdom. It leads to disorder and every evil practice.

Heavenly wisdom, in contrast, is very different. First it is pure. That is, it is not mixed or diluted with the earthly kind of "wisdom." Perhaps wisdom's primary quality is peace. This should be no surprise. God is known as "the God of peace" (Philippians 4:9), Jesus is the "Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6 KJV), sons of God (those like God Himself) are peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). The entire message of the Gospel is a message of a reconciling peace between man and God (and subsequently peace among men). No wonder God's kingdom is the kingdom of peace.

After stating that wisdom is also

“Perhaps wisdom’s primary quality is peace.”

(please read these slowly) considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere, James again highlighted the need for peace to predominate. He concluded his list of qualities with, “Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.” (James 3:18)

But apparently those to whom James was writing noticed that peace didn’t always have its way, even among Christians. So he insightfully identified the cause for their lack of peace—some were not at peace within themselves. “Well, ain’t that the truth!” When our lives are right with God and one another, we seldom if ever agitate others. Monitor yourself. Whenever you have a rub with someone, take a quick (but serious) look inside. Yep, when we’re angry at the cat we often kick the dog. Frustration inside finds its expression outside. More specifically, what did James say is the cause of our frustration? We want and we don’t have. Talk about prophecy! That certainly is a 21st century, consumer–oriented problem, isn’t it! We want something and don’t get it so we take it out on one another in one form or another. The core problem James is addressing is a class envy problem (James 1:9f, 27; 2:1ff; 4:13-5:6). Status, power, and control are accompanying issues.

Remember I asked you to hold my initial thought? Ok, time to bring it back. I stated that the Bible not only teaches us how to act, but helps us evaluate what we see in the world around us. For example, lying, cheating, and stealing are wrong. I don’t have to consider those things because the Bible tells me they are wrong. The fact that some people who lie cheat and/or steal seem to get ahead in life does not make those behaviors acceptable or desirable. They are “unwise” behaviors.

As we look around us in the church (locally and more broadly), we see too many brethren who seem to relish conflict. If there is conflict, they want to jump in and make more of it. If there is none, they will almost certainly produce some. That’s not only unwise, it’s wrong. “The Lord’s servant must not quarrel,” (2 Timothy 2:24).

Unfortunately, conflict is normal. Peace is not. But peace should be the ambiance enshrouding the arena in which conflict over truth is contested. Even in the intensely contested, prejudicially explosive issue like the “gentile problem” James faced in Acts 15, peace was pursued and attained. And no wonder, when conflict is approached in a spirit of consideration, submission, mercy, impartiality, and sincerity (James 3:17), peace can prevail. In our continuing effort to walk with truth, peace must be a fellow traveler. Anything else is “unwise”. Those who do not love peace, do not love the truth. “The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit,” (Romans 14:17).

“Wisdom that comes from heaven is...peace-loving,” (James 3:18).

Tom Torpy preaches for the Jericho Church of Christ in Mocksville, NC.

# Our First Love

**Carl Etchison**

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus, write: 'These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. Yet I hold this against you: you have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place,'" (Revelation 2:1-5).

The apostle Paul had established the church at Ephesus while on his second journey. He would spend three years there, his longest work in one place. That is no doubt why the meeting at Miletus (Acts 20:13-36) was so tender. In a hurry to get back to Jerusalem, he called the Ephesian elders to come to Miletus. He told them that it would be the last time he would see them. He also warned them about false teachers, encouraging them to be on guard against these false wolves who would surely trouble them after his departure. He would also warn his young charge Timothy about false teachers as he ministered in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3, 6:3).

Guess what? The church at Ephesus listened to him! They successfully weathered the storm of false doctrine. Jesus Himself tells us as much in his letter to the Ephesian church (Revelation 2:1-2). The Lord said that Ephesus had no patience for false doctrine. But were the Ephesians too successful? The church had in fact resisted false teachers, but it wasn't faithful. Why not? Jesus said that they had left their first love! Furthermore, He threatened to personally remove their lamp stand (their status as a church) if they didn't repent. What Ephesus shows us is that a church can be "faithful in doctrine" and still be unsound!

What does this mean, "You have forsaken your first love?" Maybe we can find some clues in Paul's prayer for the church in Ephesus in the letter he wrote to them. We find that prayer in Ephesians 3:14-19: "For this reason I kneel before the Father…I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the

"What Ephesus shows us is that a church can be 'faithful in doctrine' and still be unsound!"

measure of all the fullness of God."

Here, then, is the "first love" they had, then lost, in Ephesus. It was their love for Christ Himself! Paul had prayed that God would strengthen them inwardly by the Holy Spirit, that Christ would live in their hearts through faith, that they would be rooted and established in love, and finally that they would comprehend and appreciate something of the vastness of Christ's love for them. Paul was talking about a relationship with Jesus, a relationship based on love, faith and power. Their "first love" was this intimate relationship with Jesus. It is this lost connection that Jesus described in Revelation 2.

It's the same problem that is experienced in many floundering marriages. The husband begins to take the relationship for granted, becoming neglectful of the deeper expressions of love. The wife then begins to feel that neglect, that disconnection of love. There is no intimacy. When she tries to talk to her husband, the husband, of course, fails to see how that could be! After all, he does take care of her in many ways. He provides her with a nice house, nice clothes, money to spend…all she needs. Or so he thinks.

Are these things enough to show his love for his wife? No, they're not! She feels the emotional detachment. There is no closeness, no intimacy in their relationship. He has not been with another woman, and in that sense is not unfaithful to his wife. But he has become emotionally disconnected. There is no relationship; only an arrangement. No love, no relationship.

That seems to be what happened in Ephesus. They were doctrinally faithful (no ear for false teaching), but they had become emotionally detached from Christ. They lost their reliance upon and intimacy with Christ.

Again, Ephesus shows us that a church can be both sound and unfaithful. We can be committed to truth and lose commitment to Christ. We can become more devoted to an idea or a system than a Person (Christ). And the scariest part is this—it can happen without us ever noticing it! Ephesus apparently was not aware that this had happened to them until Jesus confronted them. What about us? What about you? Have we left our first love?

Paul's closing to his letter to the Ephesian brethren also serves as a reminder: "Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love," (Ephesian 6:24).

Carl Etchison serves the Greenville Church of Christ in Greenville, NC, as preacher and elder.

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# Pride Goes Before Destruction

**Jack Exum**

Humility, of all virtues, is uniquely Christian. It is the opposite of pride and cuts the "I" right out of it. Humility is difficult to define, hard to grasp, easily seen and eternally remembered. It never runs out of gas and is the primary virtue from which all others flow.

Humility is hard to find, more difficult to acquire and almost impossible to maintain. When someone shouts, "I've got it!" he just lost it. Solomon, the wise king said, "Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall," (Proverbs 16:18). True humility is divinely admired, yet the spirit of the world kicks it, shuns it, curses it. It is misdefined, misapplied, misunderstood and by most of us...just missed! You cannot possess it; it must govern and possess you.

Our Lord continues to ask the world powers, "How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me?" (Exodus 10:3). True humility is a basic virtue—the raw material out of which most all other goodness comes.

Humility is the highest, hardest and longest lesson to be learned in the school of saints. It is imperative, for without it, man falters at first and fails at last. It is not some optional gear to be purchased at some way station along the road. It is that powerful generator of other virtues that eventually will give victory to the one possessed and controlled by it. Jesus began the great sermon on the mount with the instruction, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," (Matthew 5:3). He speaks of the genesis of conversion—the beginning mark of every sinner because pride is the lock, sin is the cell, and humility is the key.

> "Humility places all on equal footing, for each one is to be subject to the other."

This great power is enjoined upon every believer. It is not an aptitude of some select few; to the contrary, it must be the attitude of all. The apostle writes, "For I say through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith," (Romans 12:3). Be honest before God and think realistically about yourself. Measure your own life carefully and note the gifts given and the limitations of them. If I am right with God, everyone is blessed—my family, my neighbors, my friends, and especially me.

James writes, “Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and he will lift you up,” (James 4:10). Have you ever seen a farmer examine a handful of soil? Watch as he rubs it so gently between his fingers, for it is in this soil he plants and looks for the harvest. Humility is the broken soil in the hands of the Master. The biggest test is getting down on your knees before God. Can a proud man pray or sing or take the supper or truly serve God or others? The Psalmist says, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise,” (Psalm 51:17). How does God get someone up who is already up, or teach someone who sees no need of being taught, or leads someone who has announced he is the leader of all?

Humility brings men to a point of law in order to teach them the grace of God. The little girl asked the preacher, “Why do you bow your head when you get in the pulpit?” His reply was one of false humility, “I do that because I’m asking God to give me a good sermon!” Then came the child’s honest report, “Well, why don’t he do it?”

Peter writes, “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to the other and be clothed with humility, for God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you in due time,” (1 Peter 5:5-6). Humility places all on equal footing, for each one is to be subject to the other. Husband is subject to wife and wife to husband. Parents are subject to children and children to parents. Grandfather is subject to the smallest wee grandchild, and let the youngest among us give due honor to the grandfather.

Then, enlarge this to the circle of the church. Let the oldest elder (pastor) among us kneel and wash the feel of the youngest. Yes, all of you be subject to one another that God might glorify His body, the church, with love and unity. Amen!

Jack Exum can be contacted at RR 4 Box 215, Lake City, FL 32024.

# Wherever the Wind Blows

**Stan Helton**

The word translated "spirit" in the Bible can mean either "wind" or "breath." In the Old Testament, the Hebrew for "Spirit" is ruach and in the New, the Greek is pneuma. This creates a wonderful little word–play comparing the Spirit of God (something incomprehensible) to wind or breath (something we cannot generally see, but yet not so mysterious). It also gives us a clue to the ways of the Holy Spirit.

In Genesis 1:2 the "Spirit of God" hovers over the emptiness and chaos of the water–covered earth. Some translators choose to say a "wind from God" blew over the waters. While we could hardly call this a "wrong" translation—the word, in fact, can literally be "wind"—it seems to miss the point that God is creating something beautiful out of something chaotic, which is precisely the work of God's Spirit as revealed later in the Bible.

Later, after an account of how God took some of the Spirit from Moses and put that same Spirit upon his seventy elders, God sent a "wind from the Lord" to blow in quail for the people to eat (Numbers 11:31). The translators are probably right here, but see how quickly Scripture can move from "Spirit" to "wind"?

These two notions become intertwined in Ezekiel's vision (Ezekiel 37). The Spirit of the Lord took the prophet to a valley of dry bones. The Lord asks Ezekiel if these bones can live again. Ezekiel wisely answers, "You alone know." God then commanded Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones: "Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! I will make breath enter you and you will come to life." As the prophet prophesies, the bones begin to rattle. They reconnect to one another. Then, muscle and tendons began to appear and finally, skin wrapped around the reconstituted bodies. But, "there was no breath in them."

The Lord then told Ezekiel to prophesy to the "wind." He obeyed, and then "breath" entered the bodies, and "they came to life and stood up on their feet!"

Through this vision God communicates that He will give His people new life (from chaos to creation). He said, "I will put my Spirit in you and you will live," (Ezekiel 37:14).

Jesus, in His discussion with Nicodemus, used this same word–play: "You must be born again. The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it come from or where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit," (John 3:7-8). What is amazing is that the ones born of the Spirit take on the characteristics of the wind, or the Spirit of God.

We are not caught unaware, then, when Pentecost comes; the sound of rushing wind accompanies the arrival of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). Luke here uses a word for wind that cannot mean "Spirit." This sound of wind "fills the whole house" where the disciples are meeting. Then all those sitting there "were filled with the Holy Spirit," much as the house had been filled with the sound of rushing wind.

"Wind," or "breath," then is a metaphor through which God helps us understand how He works through His Spirit. Consistently, we see the same movement from chaos to creation. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

May God send His Spirit to blow on us!

Stan Helton preaches for the Carrolton Ave. church in New Orleans, LA.

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# What Does the Lord Require of You?

### Irvin Kirk

A lawyer once asked Jesus, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" On another occasion, the one we refer to as the "rich young ruler" asked the Lord, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" The Jews to whom Peter preached on the day of Pentecost asked Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren what shall we do?" The Philippian jailor asked of Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

This question about the requirements for salvation has been asked for thousands of years. It's a serious question. If one lives a life that is rebellious to God, then he will be among those "certain fearful" before God's judgment. But we want to be among those who will be greeted with the great invitation, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for your from the foundation of the world," (Matthew 25:35). These are the "good soil" who have no trouble understanding the requirements of this question. It is those who look for an easy solution with minimal requirements who have trouble. There are multiplied thousands who, like the rich young ruler, look for some good thing to do that will merit them eternal life. Many think if they keep certain forms or rituals they will satisfy God's demands. The truth is, these minimal forms never have been pleasing to God. Many think just attending worship and Bible study two or three times a week is enough. Others think just baptism or having their name on the church roll will be sufficient.

Both the Old and New Testaments are replete with God's rejection of people who just performed some minimal rite or ritual righteousness. In Isaiah, God severely condemned Judah for rituals and forms void of a righteous heart. Isaiah says, "Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom, listen to the law of our God you people of Gomorrah! 'The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?' says the Lord. 'I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them,'" (Isaiah 1:10-14).

The Old Testament prophet Micah expressed God's desire this way, "With what shall I come

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before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and love mercy and walk humbly with your God," (Micah 6:6-8).

Jesus harshly condemned the scribes and the Pharisees when he said, "Woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye tithe mint and anise and cumin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law: justice, and mercy and faith; but these ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone," (Matthew 23:23-24). In another place Jesus condemned the Pharisees and scribes for honoring tradition and human commandments, "Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men," (Matthew 15:8-9). These texts should suffice to demonstrate that form and rituals are not enough.

What does the Lord require of us? How has He expressed His desires for our faithfulness? When we look at the texts already cited we quickly learn that it is the heart God wants, not rituals and forms only. When we begin to think of faithfulness as the result of rituals and law keeping, we fall into the trap of the scribes and Pharisees. Yes, we must know the law and we must also keep the law, but the law is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end. God gave man the law so man would know how to live in relationship with Him and others. This is the way He chose to reveal to us His nature and that portion of His mind so that we can understand. It is through the law that we know the nature of sin. It s through the law that we know what is righteous, holy and good. Paul said, "So that the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and righteous, and good," (Romans 7:12). In essence, it teaches us how God wants us to live.

Matthew records several occasions when the Sadducees and Pharisees tried to entrap Jesus with their questions. One of these confrontations was when the Pharisees asked Him, "which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus' response was, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all they mind. This is the

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great and first commandment. And a second like unto it is this, Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself," (Matthew 22:36-40).

God is eternal. We don't question this truth. Therefore, all the values and principles of God are eternal. These principles are the foundation of the law of the Old Testament. They are also the foundation of the principles in the New Testament. They are the same principles generations following us will be guided by. They are the same principles that will endure into eternity. "I the Lord do not change," (Malachi 3:6). "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, yea and forever," (Hebrews 13:8).

Therefore, as children of God we are to love Him with all our heart, soul, strength and mind. This truth endures forever.

Irvin Kirk can be contacted at 179 Fountain Place, Huntington, WV, 25701.

# Daily Discipleship

**Peter Rode**

A particular TV news magazine program once showed how some people prepare for Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of Lent (the 40 days preceding Easter). On "Fat Tuesday"—Mardi Gras—they do as much sinful stuff as they think they can get away with, knowing that the next day the would ask for God's forgiveness and give up those sins. Self–denial may be a popular activity during the season of Lent, but I don't think it's what Jesus had in mind when He spoke of taking up one's cross daily and following Him (Matthew 16:24). His call for self–denial was to a daily commitment to Him in all areas of life.

When Paul wrote to the church in Rome, he anticipated that people would think it didn't matter to God if they were less than totally committed to His Son. God's grace was there to cover all their wrongdoing. Paul found it unbelievable that people of faith would think they could "continue in sin" just so they could experience more of God's grace! Instead, he declared that we should consider ourselves dead to sin (Romans 6:11). As believers in Jesus, we need to follow Him faithfully every day. It is never right to take a time–out from our commitment to Him.

When Charles Swindoll was a little boy, he was greatly influenced by this remark from an old Texan: “The problem with Christian life is that it’s so daily.” Following Jesus is a lifestyle that builds not only on past lessons and decisions, but also on our dedication day by day. We cannot live off yesterday’s successes, last week’s prayers, or the Bible stories we heard when we were children.

Each new day is both a challenge and an opportunity. Our faith will be challenged, and we can use that challenge as an opportunity to grow in our relationship with God. Jesus Himself said that those who wanted to be His disciples were expected to be in a continual attitude of self–denial and obedience to Him.

When asked how he was doing, a man in his eighties once replied, “My life moves along contentedly in well–worn grooves.” As I observe my friends and neighbors around me, I realize that most of them are also following a basic routine. Although seemingly trapped on a treadmill, they are working at their jobs, raising families, and serving in the church. There’s nothing necessarily heroic or exciting about their lives, nor is there about mine. This reminds me of the response of Bernard Baruch when asked who he thought was the greatest personality of our age. With great wisdom at age 94 he said, “The fellow who does his job every day. The mother who has children and gets up to get them breakfast, keep them clean, and send them off to school. The fellow who keeps the streets clean…the unknown soldiers, millions of them.”

The apostle Paul also emphasized the importance of faithfulness in everyday life. He urged his fellow believers to settle down, lead a quiet life, and provide for their own families (1 Thessalonians 4:11; 1 Timothy 5:8). Most of us are ordinary Christians who live routine lives. Yet, our extraordinary God wants all of us to be everyday disciples who are faithful and fruitful. As each day unfolds, we must pause and remind ourselves that this is a day dedicated to God, that it is to be used for His glory, and that it is best lived with a continued recollection of what Jesus did for us on the cross.

Starting today, let’s look at our Christian lives as being a daily commitment. Let’s rededicate ourselves to Christ in 2002 and follow Him day by day.

Peter Rode can be contacted at
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NC 27410.

# The Resolution

**Kent Massey**

January 1 is the day of new beginnings.

You can go out and walk that morning and you've exercised every day of the year thus far. You can swear off the Snickers and Doritos all day and the year will reflect a whole new healthy and regimented diet. As the first morning of the New Year turns to afternoon, you can claim that you haven't been mean to your spouse, yelled at the kids, left dirty laundry on the floor and have read your Bible daily.

On January 1 life can be changed. For one day, all your good intentions can be realized and your bad habits forgotten. At least for a few hours (or minutes), the year is a perfect reflection of what you want to be. You can feel it. "This is going to be a year to remember!"

But then, January 1 is followed by January 2, 3, 4. The morning walk gets shelved because of the cozy warm bed inside and the cold weather outside. The candy bar wrappers and chip crumbs begin appearing on the desk again. Someone has cut you off in traffic, or your spouse forgot to do something you needed done, the kids' rooms haven't been cleaned, the clothes on the floor make your bedroom look like a disaster area and as you settle into the easy chair with your Bible opened, your eyes go shut before the first verse is read. And the year becomes no different than any other one.

Resolutions are good things, but we tend to make resolutions that are safe, sensible and self-centered. We want to make tiny cosmetic changes instead of a total remodeling of our lifestyles and priorities. That is why a single story in Luke's gospel speaks to us so early into this new year. There Jesus made the ultimate resolution that may set the pattern for our resolutions for every day of every New Year.

Joseph, Mary and Jesus had made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. The feast had ended and they were heading home to the chores and responsibilities that filled their daily lives. Joseph, being a carpenter, must have had projects needing to be finished. Mary had the day-to-day activities to finish that kept the family intact and moving. Like most at the end of an extended vacation, they were most likely looking forward to getting back to the comfortable trappings of home.

But Jesus was nowhere to be found. After being missed for more than a day, his parents began to look for him among the many relatives. They could not find him. They went back to Jerusalem to look for him and spent three days in their search. They finally found at the temple.

When his parents told him that they had been searching for him, Jesus said, “Why were you searching for me? Didn’t you know I must be about my Father’s business?” (Luke 2:41-49).

Young Jesus refused to let his relationship with the Father be regulated by some prearranged, culturally imposed schedule. Instead of going along with the return-to-business attitude, he showed us what the most important business is—being about the Father’s work.

What would it mean in 2002 to act in the same way as Jesus? What would it mean to live, not impressed by the world’s call of the urgent, but according to what God wants from us all? Instead of Day-timers and Palm Pilots ruling our days, what if our days were ordered by the call of God and his plans? We may discover that “business as usual” may not be the way God does business. Surely the best New Year’s resolution is the one in which we choose to live under the umbrella of God’s expectations and to make it our business to be a part of God’s business. But what is God’s business? Jesus gives us a clue.

First, God’s business is the word. When young Jesus felt called to live beyond business as usual and answered the call of God’s business, he went to the temple. That means he desired and had an appetite for God’s word. I hope this year brings a deeper commitment from each of us to be serious about our worship attendance and attendance at Bible studies. Those are vital times we can be in contact with the word of God and have it touch our hearts so that we can be prepared to do the next phase of God’s business.

Next, God’s business is the world. Being about God’s business does not mean that we do nothing but attend worship and insulate ourselves and talk a good game, but never get involved. While Jesus started out in the temple, he left to go out into the world. We must follow his example because we cannot be Good’s agents of change in the world if we refuse to engage the world. I hope this year is the year in which we truly get serious about sharing Jesus and telling the “old story” in a relevant, applicable way to those who need it most.

Maybe this year, instead of resolving to lose ten pounds, we should let our nourishment come from “doing the will of God and finishing his work,” (John 4:34).

What if instead of resolving to get more exercise this year, we resolve to tone up our spiritual muscles by “working out our salvation with fear and trembling?” (Philippians 2:12).

What if instead of resolving to spend less time in front of the TV, we resolve to spend more time with the word that is a “lamp to our feet and a light to our path?" (Psalm 119:105).

Maybe the ultimate New Year's resolution is not one that challenges our fat intake or exercise levels. The ultimate resolution is to allow the love of God through Christ to change our lives and give us a "year to remember!"

Kent Massey can be contacted at 4900 Providence Rd., Charlotte, NC 28226.

# Brotherhood News

**Mark Hudson**

Mocksville, NC... Carolina Bible Camp will be the location for the 2002 Singles Retreat, March 1,2 & 3. The Cole Mill Road Church of Christ Singles Committee from Durham, NC, is organizing the event. The cost of the weekend is $10 per person. Don Utley will be the guest speaker. The theme is "The Power of One," and devotional topics will include "Happily Ever After?" and "A Dream Unfulfilled: Separated by Death or Divorce." For registration or information please contact Angela Carmon at (919) 383-4120 or Lafonda Richburg at (919) 543-0166. You may visit the Carolina Bible Camp website at http://users.aol.com/cbiblecamp/. Cary, NC...The 58th annual Carolina Lectures will be hosted April 7-11 by the Cary Church of Christ. The facility is located at 6640 Tryon Rd. in Cary. The theme this year is "People of the Book," with keynote speakers Mac Lyon, Neal Pollard, Mel Sapp and David Pharr. For information call 919-854-9988 or follow the link at www.carychurchofchrist.org. Lenoir, NC...James D. Pharr is the new preacher for the Lenoir Church of Christ, beginning his ministry there on December 9, 2001. Jim, his wife Karen, who is a schoolteacher, and their children, David, Jaime, Andrew and Katie had been working with the Central church of Christ in Cleveland, Tennessee since 1999. Prior to being the pulpit minister in Cleveland, Jim was the pulpit minister for the Ault Road church of Christ in Knoxville, Tennessee for 8 years. Pharr is a graduate of the East Tennessee School of Preaching where he graduated first in his class and was elected as student body President. Prior to that time he obtained a Bachelor of Science degree at Limestone College in Gaffney, South Carolina and attended Freed-Hardeman University between 1977 and 1981.

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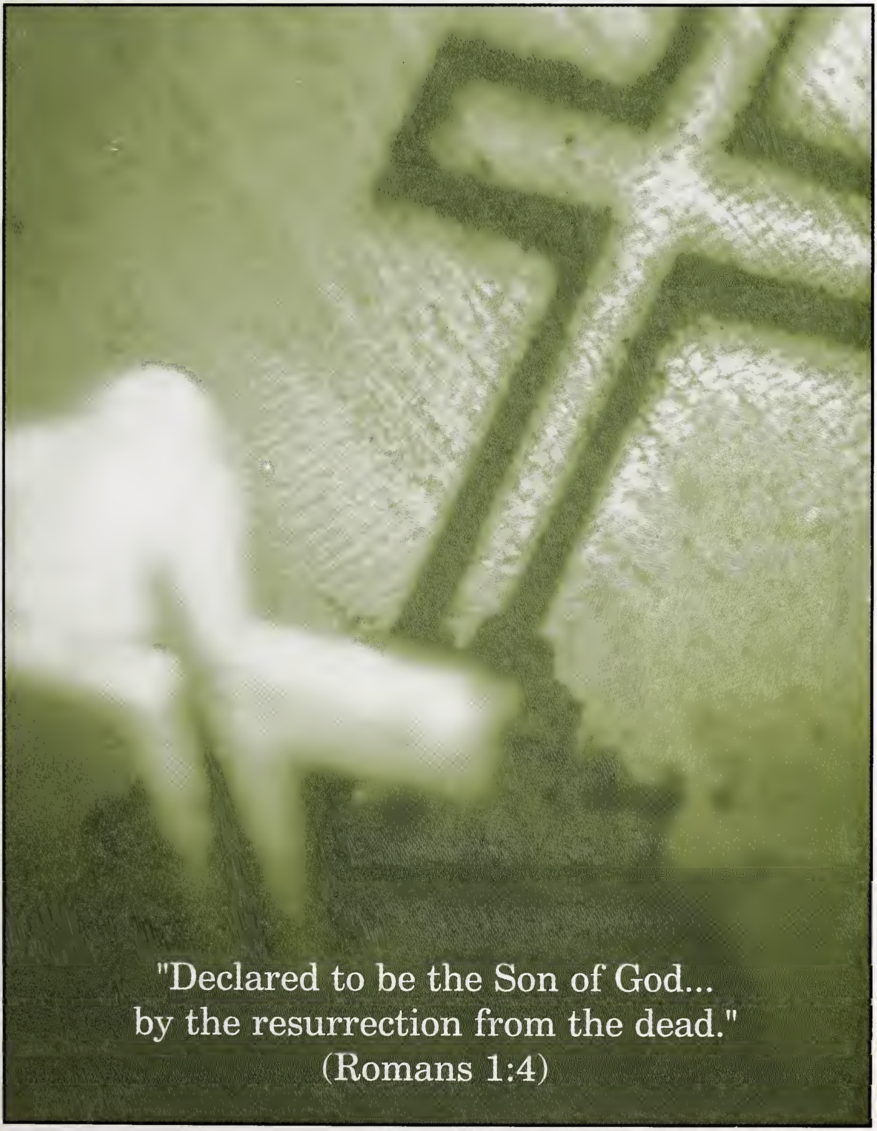

"Declared to be the Son of God...
by the resurrection from the dead."
(Romans 1:4)

CAROLINA christian

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# Resurrection Faith

**Dennis Conner**

A few years ago the infamous Jesus Seminar met in Chicago to turn its attention to the historical reality of Christ's resurrection. The "scholars" concluded that the bodily resurrection of Jesus did not actually happen, but when it came time for them to summarize their findings in a statement at the conclusion of their meeting, the participants found themselves in an interesting dilemma. While they did not believe that Jesus was literally raised, they still concluded that something happened and felt compelled to include some kind of resurrection language. Why not just deny the resurrection altogether? Just toss it out and leave us with perhaps the greatest teacher and ethicist who ever lived. Why couldn't they do that? Because, like it or not, they realized that without the resurrection Christianity loses its significance. Consequently they say that even though the resurrection didn't happen, it still has significance because of the story it tells. But how can the Christian faith retain its significance (and perhaps more importantly its very integrity) if that story is false?

The apostle Paul understood the implications of that question when he wrote to the church in Corinth, "And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty...if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins...If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most pitiable," (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17, 19). No resurrection, no Christianity. It's that simple...and profound.

Last Sunday I gathered with about 70 other folks to worship. The object of our worship? God, who was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. We worshiped Christ, the still living and now reigning Lord. Some would argue that it is not necessary to believe in a historical resurrection in order to appreciate the uniqueness of Jesus. He was the most godlike individual humanity has ever known, a peasant genius who produced a body of moral and ethical teaching that has transformed the human experience; an inspirational man who was willing to die for something he believed in, but still dead all the same.

Well, if those things are true, then Jesus is indeed to be respected, admired, even adored; but he is not to be worshiped. If the resurrection did not happen, then there was no compelling reason for us to be gathered for worship last Sunday morning, or any Sunday morning. If Jesus was not raised, then he was no more than Ghandi or any other martyred leader; he is just one of many dead heroes. If Jesus was not raised, then let me do something else with my Sunday mornings. Let me join the fellas on the golf course that I see every Sunday on my way to worship. Indeed, let me do something else with my life. Let me eat, drink and be merry!

In John 20 the apostle strings together three separate resurrection encounters. The first, in verses 1-10, focuses on Peter and John. When Mary Magdalene tells them that the body is gone, they race to the tomb. John outran Peter, arriving at the burial site first. When John looked inside, what he saw there would forever change his life. What he saw was... nothing. An empty tomb and empty grave clothes. That's all the evidence John needed. Here's a question for the skeptics: where was the body? On the day of Pentecost when Peter preached that he and the other apostles were witnesses of the resurrected Christ, all the authorities had to do to crush this upstart movement was produce a body. They knew where the tomb was. Produce the body, expose Peter, and crush the movement. Had there been a body then, there would be no Christianity now.

The second account (verses 11-18) centers on Mary Magdalene. She wasn't looking for a miracle; just the body of her Lord. The angels asked her why she was weeping. She replied that she did not know where the body of her Master was. When she turned to leave there was a third figure there. Mary thought it was the gardener. He repeated the question of the angels, "Why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Mary responded, "Please, just tell where you took the body, and I'll take care of him." Then, Jesus spoke her name, "Mary." She knew that voice! It was the voice that had forgiven her, the voice that had changed her life! Jesus spoke, and she believed.

The third account is that of Thomas (verses 19-29). The night of resurrection Sunday Jesus appeared to the apostles, minus Thomas. They saw his hands and his side, and they believed. After bestowing the Holy Spirit and empowering them with authority, Jesus departed.

Enter Thomas. "We have seen the Lord!" they told him. "You saw Jesus?" "Yes." "But he's dead," “If Christ is not raised…then let me do something else with my life.”

"Not anymore." Thomas, "I'll believe it when I see the wounds myself." Before we heap our criticism upon Thomas, understand that he wants to see only what has already been shown to the other disciples. He's not willing to ride the coat tails of the other disciples on the way to faith. And the truth is, there's a lot of Thomas in most of us. We want evidence. That's a hard pill to swallow - a dead man walking! We want to know for sure and some of us take more convincing than others.

Eight days later Jesus again came to the disciples, this time with Thomas present. The Lord instructed the skeptical believer to reach out and touch, seeing for himself. Then upon seeing the evidence, Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord and my God." At which time Jesus responded, "You believe because you have seen. Blessed are those who do not see, yet believe." Is it possible to believe in the historical, bodily resurrection of Christ without physical evidence and still maintain one's intellectual integrity? Apparently so.

These resurrection accounts affirm two fundamental truths. First, something happened that day. Each of the three accounts reflects either the unwillingness or inability of those involved to initially accept Jesus' resurrection. The accounts are honest in this. However, their disbelief was changed to belief; their despair to blessed joy. Why? What happened? A resurrection, perhaps?

The second truth is that people come to faith in different ways, but they arrive nevertheless. As Fred Craddock observed, "There is faith and then there is faith. There is faith based on signs and faith that needs none; there is faith weak and faith strong, faith shallow and faith deep, faith growing and faith retreating," (John Knox Press, 1982, p. 144). Craddock further observes that these stories reveal a variety of faith experiences and that not one is made normative for everyone. Yet, underlying them all is the foundational truth that Christ is risen.

Sunday is coming. Again we will assemble for worship. We will share the Lord's Supper with one another and with the risen Christ. We will honor the living Lord, not a dead hero.

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# The Battle of Good and Evil

**Ron Newberry**

The Lord of the Rings, J.R.R. Tolkein's literary masterpiece, has been developed into a movie and to date has grossed nearly $800 million dollars worldwide. It is a classic epic battle between good and evil. We discover that what Lady Galadriel, Queen of the Elves, says is true: "Even the smallest person can change the course of the future."

In Tolkein's story the future of the civilization of Middle Earth rests in the fate of the One Ring, which has been lost for centuries. Powerful evil forces are relentless and merciless in their search for it. But fate has placed the ring in the hands of a young Hobbit named Frodo Baggins, who inherits the ring and becomes the reluctant hero.

A daunting task lies ahead for young Frodo. He becomes the ring bearer whose mission is to destroy the mystical ring in the fires of Mount Doom, where it was forged. But he can't do it by himself. A fellowship is formed that bonds with Frodo to achieve what he could not possibly accomplish on his own. The wisdom of Gandalf, the friendship of Sam, Merry and Pippin, the courage of Aragorn and Bobomir, the accuracy of Legolas, and the strength of Gimli all join the Fellowship of the Ring to protect Frodo and help save Middle Earth.

A fairy tale? Yes. A story forged in the fertile mind of a genius writer? Yes. Fiction set in a nonexistent time and place in a world that is not real? Yes. Why then do these stories have such an appeal? I believe part of the reason is the stories represent what we all recognize: there is a battle between good and evil going on all around us. We see a clear distinction between the forces of good and the forces of evil. And we know that somehow, some way good will win out at the end of the day.

I don't wish to turn this into some allegorical tale about God and Satan. However, there are some elements that are similar-which we would do well to recognize and internalize-that are true. They aren't true because they are portrayed in a movie. They are true because they are illustrated in Scripture and in our experience.

There is indeed a battle of good and evil going on right now, all around us. Paul's understanding of that clash is expressed in Ephesians 6:10-18. Our struggle is not an earthly one. Our battle is against the powers of this

“We are a band of brothers and sisters who have been forged into a fellowship.”

dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Our only hope is to put on the full armor of God so that we can both defend the truth and fight against evil.

I remind you that Paul's letter was not written to an individual or to individualists. It was written to a congregation. The point is we are not to think of ourselves as alone. We are a band of brothers and sisters who have been forged into a fellowship. We each contribute something to the overall success of God, who is working through us. None of us acting alone can achieve anything substantial. Even together we accomplish only what our human effort can achieve unless God is the real Lord of our lives. When we act unselfishly to the glory of God, then our fellowship forged in the heart of God, purchased by the blood of Jesus, sealed by the Holy Spirit will bring victory. We may not see that victory as clearly as we would like, but rest assured it is there and it is ours.

Yes, The Fellowship of the Ring is fantasy, but the church might do well to be instructed by a fictional story to appreciate the Fellowship of the Cross!

# What Others Have Said

“Forgiveness is our command. Judgment is not."
(C. Neil Strait)

"In prayer, it is better to have a heart without words than words without heart."
(Ghandi)

"It takes less time to do things right than to explain why you did it wrong."
(Henry Wadsworth Longfellow)

"Anyone can devise a plan by which good people go to heaven. Only God can devise a plan whereby sinners, which are His enemies, can go to heaven."
(Lewis Sperry Chafer)

"He who cannot forgive others destroys the bridge over which he himself must pass."
(George Herbert)

# Fall Down in Worship

**Carl Etchison**

There is a story of a once proud church that was in deep, constant decline. The church leaders thought a young preacher would help to reverse the trend and the perfect young man was found and brought in to interview. In his meeting with the church leaders he said, "With God's help, I'll lead this church into the 19th century!" One of the elders spoke up and questioned, "Don't you mean the 20th century?" "No, brother," the young preacher replied, "we'll take this one century at a time."

This fictional story does highlight two actual truths that need to be grasped today. First, churches really are in decline today. Church growth is not keeping up with population growth in America. Attendance is down across the spectrum of religious bodies, with only a few exceptions. It isn't that people are giving up on their faith. Rather, as studies demonstrate, they are looking for more relevant ways to express their faith. And second, to reverse that trend will demand some changes. Many people are left cold with what they perceive as traditions and structures that are no longer relevant, which has led to the controversy today over worship styles. Discussion of worship styles is simply an attempt to communicate the unchanging gospel to a changing world.

My intent in this article, however, is not to become involved in a discussion over styles of worship. Rather, it is to take a deeper look at the meaning of worship itself. Ultimately, forms and styles of worship are about us; what we like. There is a place for that in the sense of attempting to be culturally relevant ("all things to all men"), but for that to be the focus of worship is self-centered. And self isn't what worship is about! No, worship is about God. In worship we focus on Him.

The place to begin thinking about worship, then, is with God Himself. At this point there are two fundamental truths about God to be kept in mind: He is transcendent (He is far above and beyond us), and He is imminent (God is so very, very close to us). The first has to do with His character and holiness, the second with His presence. God's greatness makes worship necessary and His nearness makes worship possible!

These two truths-His greatness and His nearness-mean that God is very real to us in our daily

"God's greatness makes worship necessary, and His nearness makes worship possible!"

lives. God is powerful, majestic and awesome and He is near to us. If we really do believe that, then God becomes real to us. All His presence drives us to our knees in worship! So, the focus of worship is not on form and procedure (these are means to an end), but on God.

There are two stories in the Bible that show that worship is an encounter with God and that worship is also connected to daily life.

The first story is about a man named Jehosaphat and can be found in 2 Chronicles 20. An alliance of the Edomites, Moabites and Meunites was pressing down on Judah. Jehosaphat knew that he is out manned in this one. He proclaimed a fast and Judah assembled at the temple. Then, he prayed (2 Chronicles 20:6-12). In that prayer Jehosaphat recognized the past and God's power to save. Then, he explained the distress experienced in the present. And finally, he asked God to intervene to rescue His people. The prayer serves as a good model for us today: "God, I know you have the power to heal and to save, for you have done it in the past. I'm suffering again, and now would be a great time for you to act!

In response to the prayer, Jahaziel, a Levite, gave the Lord's answer (20:15-17). It would be God, not Jehosaphat, who would fight that day! They were to bravely march out along a route that God gave them, but they were not to fight. Instead, they were to look to God. To complete the story, everything happened the way God said it would. The opposing allied army was thrown into confusion and they wiped out each other, leaving Judah to pick up the spoils.

Judah's response? Worship (20:18-19)! On the one hand, it was immediate and unplanned as they just fell down. But on the other, it was also planned as it was led by the Levites. God's act of deliverance compelled them to fall down and worship.

So, what can we learn about worship from Jehosaphat? Well, at times we, like Jehosaphat, feel overwhelmed and we cry out to God when we don't have strength to stand. Then, when He rescues and blesses us, we worship Him! Worship should be the natural response to God's great deeds in our behalf.

But what about those times when God doesn't rescue us? What happens when the tests come back positive? When the pink slip or the divorce papers are delivered? When we stand by an open grave and say good-bye? That brings us to the second, more familiar, story of Job.

As the book opens, Job is living a charmed and blessed life. He is the wealthiest, most respected wise man in the East. According to God, he is the most righteous man on earth. Then, in rapid succession, everything was ripped away! First, his cattle, then sheep, and then camels are stolen. Most of the servants that cared for them were killed. And then, all ten of his children died in a freak accident. That's about as far from a "Jehosaphat" day as can be!

What do you do when your life comes apart at the seams? If you're Job, there's only one thing to do (Job 1:20-21). Job was so overcome; where could he go but to the Lord? When you come to the Lord, you come in worship.

Job's response is the same response as that of Jehosaphat! Their lives were different, but the response was the same. Their respective worship did not sound the same (rejoicing on the one hand, wailing on the other), but it looked the same-they fell down in worship.

Both of these stories illustrate an important truth we cannot afford to forget: the connection between worship and life. We so often view worship as "religious duty" done on Sundays. It begins at opening prayer and ends with closing prayer. Sometimes the result is that worship becomes little more than artificial times of repeated rituals. Our concept of worship can become trivialized and restricted. We sometimes see worship only in terms of "five acceptable acts," with the stress being on us doing them right. In the process, the emphasis in worship can subtly shift from God to us.

The stories of Jehosaphat and Job remind us that worship takes place when we encounter God (His majesty), when we are overwhelmed by God's gifts (His grace), or when we are overcome by trials and sorrow (His tests). Either way, we are driven to God…and to worship!

So, worship involves more than "going to church" and doing church things. Worship applies to life! It comes from living for God. When life is filled with blessings, we worship. When life is filled with heartache, we worship.

Worship is our life response to God.

Carl Etchison serves the Greenville Church of Christ as preacher and elder. He can be contacted at 1706 Greenville Boulevard SE, Greenville, North Carolina 27858.

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# Urgent Need!

# Psalm 42: Do You Know Where Your God Is?

**Dennis Conner**

A Woody Allen character frets, "If only God would give me some sign. If He would just speak to me once, anything, one sentence, two words. If He would just cough!" There are times in our lives when we have no sense of God being anywhere near. Difficulties besiege us, we turn to God, and there is no sense of His being there. No matter how much we worship or how hard we pray, there appears to be no answer to our prayers, no acknowledgment of our worship. God seems remote, unconcerned. We knock on His door and it seems that nobody is home.

In those times, we typically conclude one of two things: either God is missing, or our faith is faulty. Does it have to be that way, or is it possible that there might be a third option - the option of trust?

"As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, while they continually say to me, 'Where is your God?' When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast. Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?...O my God, my soul is cast down within me...I will say to God my Rock, 'Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?' "

This believer is uncomforted, unsatisfied. His faith is tinged by shades of doubt. Or as Craig Watts writes, "It is a faith that has no smile attached to it." He hungers and thirsts for God, yet remains unfulfilled. He is not nourished by God and feels himself to be separated from the Lord, and he is not comfortable with what he feels. There seems to be some barrier to the presence of God, so he laments, "My tears have been my food day and night." To make matters worse, the psalmist must endure the barbs and taunts of others who challenge his faith by constantly asking, "Where is your God?" Not a good question for others to be asking when it is the same question you might have been asking yourself. Their questions add fuel to the flames of doubt licking at his heart.

This believer recalls a time when worship was a joyful experi-

## “Without God, all you have are questions!”

ence and praise came easy. He remembers a time when God was real to him, but that time is long since past. Now he can only question the condition of his wounded spirit, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?" He cannot keep these anguished questions from filling his mind. "Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of my enemies?"

Perhaps this experience has a ring of familiarity to it. In fact, it is all too familiar; it is also your experience.

So where do you go in such times? Away from God? Curiously, although he felt that God was distant and unresponsive, the psalmist turns to God and clings to Him.

First, he clings to the assurance of God's steadfast love, "The Lord will command His loving kindness in the daytime..." (v. 8). In spite of what he feels, he knows what God has promised. He finds comfort in the knowledge of this assurance. Sometimes in the practice of our faith we find that our hearts over rule our minds. At other times, it may be necessary for our minds to over rule our hearts; that is, in spite of what we feel, we have to remind ourselves of what we know. In the case of this psalmist, he knows that God's love is ever present.

Second, he clings to hope. "Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God," (v. 11b). For all his questions and feelings, the psalmist recognizes that God is still the only real hope he has. His soul may be disquieted now under the burden of present circumstances, but he recognizes as well the despair of hopelessness. What's the advantage of abandoning God? Sure, belief in God does not eradicate the hard questions of life. However, without God, there is no sense to be made of anything. Without God, all you have are questions! So for the psalmist, leaving God is not an alternative. He will hope in the Lord, being convinced that in that very hope he will once again regain the vitality of his faith: "For I shall yet praise Him."

The psalmist's experience teaches us some valuable truths about faith. First, it's important to understand that we can be honest with God in our prayers. Most times we are hesitant to tell God how we really feel, equating our honesty with a kind of irreverence and disrespect. "I can't talk to God that way! I just can't say to Him what I really want to say." Consequently, we offer up sterile prayers. Even worse, we offer up dishonest prayers. Don't you think God is big enough to handle our questions, fears, doubts and feelings? Don't you think He already knows what we're thinking? We need to appreciate the sometimes brutal honesty of the psalmists. They held nothing back and poured out their hearts to the Father. We should do no less.

Second, we must recognize that the feeling of the absence of God is not the reality of the absence of God. God's presence is not dependent upon my experience of His presence; rather, it is dependent upon His own promise of His presence. God is here, whether we feel like He's here or not. Our fickle feelings do not alter the truth.

Finally, in times of distress faith does not let go. It clings desperately to God, recognizing Him alone as the source of real hope and meaning. Life may be difficult enough while believing in God, but remove Him from the picture and it makes absolutely no sense at all.

Maybe you find yourself saying as you read this, "I know this guy. He's me!" Well, if you know his feelings, then know also his faith. Whether you feel it or not, know that God is here with you. You are not abandoned; God's love for you is unwavering. Cling to Him tightly with both palms and all ten fingers. Whatever else life may say to you, trust instead in the assurance of God's love and the hope it inspires. That's the only real option there is.

Rudolph (Rudy) Senn.

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# One Year Later: Part 2

**Phil Stapp**

The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper." (1 Kings 19-11-12)

He was a long way from home, alone, scared and confused. He sat in a dark cave with an even darker cloud over his head. Elijah's life had been turned upside down. The triumph over the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel was short lived. When Jezebel vowed revenge, he got scared and ran. Now, sitting in a dark cave, he wondered what would happen next. Finally, God spoke.

"What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by" (1 Kings 19:9-11).

The wind howled, the earth moved and the fire raged, but God was not in them. Then came the gentle whisper, the calm, soft, healing voice of the almighty God. Again he asked, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Elijah repeated his reply. What God says next has been a powerful lesson for me.

You see, I can understand Elijah's feelings. I have been in that dark cave, alone and confused. I have felt that I was the only one who really cared about following God's will and I have felt the fear that is part of being pursued (though it was only my job, not my life, that was under attack). Over the past year, God's words to Elijah have spoken calmly, gently and powerfully to me.

God's message to Elijah in 1 Kings 19:15-18 is basically twofold. First, get back to work; I have things for you to do. Elijah was given time to regroup (a forty day hike in the wilderness is great therapy), then God gently reminded him of his purpose. I have learned that the refreshing spirit of God not only comes with rest, but with active involvement in God's purpose.

While no longer in "full-time" ministry, God still has a purpose for me. There was a time when I took a rest, and it was needed. But then there came a time to go back to the

## “The presence of God is all around us…”

work of serving God and others. I have been refreshed while helping hurting teens through difficult times, training young men in worship leadership, teaching classes and serving meals at the soup kitchen. It is amazing how uplifting it can be to serve others.

God's second message to Elijah was, you are not alone. We may feel all alone at times but we never are. The presence of God is all around us, especially in His people whom he preserves and protects against the evil one. While some of God's people can bring great aggravation, most bring love, compassion and comfort. God knows our need for love and support from others. I realized a long time ago that the fellowship of a Christian assembly was not a rule that God just wanted to impose on us, but a necessity of our humanity. I know that I cannot do without it.

Old friends and new have been used by God to renew my soul. Old friends that stick with you through thick and thin bring great strength and comfort. They are like rocks that you can hold on to during the most turbulent of times. New friends are like new blood, bringing cleansing, strength and energy to life. They bring freshness of perspective and insight. While I still need time to myself, I could not survive without Christian family and friends.

Elijah's conversation with God reminds me of another servant of God who was hurting and confused. His world had also been an emotional roller coaster ride. But then Jesus took Peter for a walk on the beach (see John 21:15-19). He knew the pain in Peter's heart. Jesus had witnessed the three denials (see Luke 22:60-62). So Jesus heals Peter's broken spirit by allowing him to affirm his love three times, each time encouraging Peter to show his love by fulfilling God's purpose for his life, summarized in the call to "Follow me!"

This is the renewing love that God has shared with me over the past year. He was with me in the cave and his still, calm voice has reminded me of his love and has gently moved me back into the joy of serving him and others. He has reminded me that I am not alone; there are Christian brothers and sisters to support and encourage me. Most of all, I have come to know that whether I am a full time minister or a member doing what I can to help, my purpose is found in Him. There is no greater purpose than Jesus' call to "Follow me!" While I do not know where my Savior will take my life next, as the old song says, "Where he leads, I will follow."

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# An Affair of the Heart

**Kent Massey**

Have you noticed that regardless of how good a human invention is, there always seems to be that one fault, glitch or failure that spells doom for the whole contraption. You get a queasy feeling when your mechanic peeks out from under the hood and says, "It's the drive train." You want to grab something to hold on to when the plumber solemnly proclaims, "The water line busted under the house." You feel faint when the heating and air guy just shakes his head and hands you your winter coat, two sticks and some kindling.

But the worst of all, from personal experience, is when the computer repairer looks at you and says, "The hard drive is crashed and wiped out." I know, because that happened to me last January. I came back to work after the holidays and booted up my PC and heard the worst screeching sound that I ever imagined a computer could make. It was followed by a variety of R2-D2 sounds as the screen flashed, "Unable to boot from the hard drive." Repeated tries to restart the computer always led to the same result. The repair guy came and I knew I was in trouble when he said, "This thing is fried..."

My PC was taken to the computer intensive care ward where attempts to resuscitate the drive failed. Even a company in California that specializes in recovering portions of hard drives sent me a nice but succinct letter that read, "Sorry...this one was hopeless."

I was sick. Four years of lessons, articles, notes, sermons and a book draft all gone before I could say "data backup." I learned some valuable lessons on that day and a thing or two about hard drives.

Crashing a hard drive is such a disaster because the hard drive is anatomically the heart of your machine. When the hard drive is missing, nothing else functions properly. Without the central core, the heart of the machine, the files, data and information are devoid of all sense and structure. A hard drive is really a "heart drive" and when it goes, so goes the machine.

It's not just computers that have heart drives. People and churches do as well. What threatens our heart drive and what happens when its failure causes us to experience fatal errors in our lives?

Many are the songs written over the years about "You stole my heart," or "You're a heart stealer." But in Scripture, being a heart thief is never a positive accusation. Heart-stealing was equal to taking and hijacking another's whole sense of self. 1 Samuel 15:16 shares how Absalom stole the hearts of the people of Israel. Proverbs 4:23 warns us to "Watch over your heart" so that it remains safe from the thievery of others.

Every day something is trying to steal your heart. The folks on Madison Avenue have no concern for your health, well-being or financial security. McDonalds wants your loyalty to be to their French fries, not to your arteries. Nike wants a new pair of shoes on your feet, regardless of how many pairs are gathering dust in your closet. Visa wants your money, not your financial stability. The television claims your time when it could be spent with your family. Your job consumes your energy and the best that you have to offer. Our full calendars reveal our true priorities. There are no shortages of "heart stealers."

It also happens in our churches. Our heart drive is eaten away by concerns over the types of songs we sing on Sunday or the style of worship we employ. The heart drive is weakened every time the latest brotherhood quagmire threatens to bog us down, and is slowed by complacency and lukewarmness. Without a heart drive that pumps for those in need, the church crashes just as surely and disastrously as the computer's hard drive. Without a heart drive that palpitates for those who aren't there, we lose our ability to stay focused and driven on our mission to share the good news of Jesus.

Heart drives may be just as important as hard drives; even moreso. I can rebuild files, do new sermons, compose additional lessons and write a better book, but when my heart drive crashes the effects may be eternal in consequence.

Hippolytus, a martyr and early church leader, once said, "His divine Spirit gave life to the tottering world, and the whole universe became stable once more, as if the stretching out, the agony of the cross, had in some way gotten into everything." Has Jesus gotten into your heart drive? Can other people see Him in you and you see Him in them? Is your drive safe and secure and backed up by the solid rock of His grace and truth? What a difference we will make individually and as a fellowship when we secure our heart drive.

An anthropologist once asked a Hopi Indian why so many of their tribal songs were about rain. The Hopi replied that it was because water is so scarce. With a smile, he then asked the anthropologist, "Is that why so many of your songs are about love?" Check your heart drive this week!

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# Tears of Blessing

**Russ Jurek**

Our daughter Katie has been dating a young man for some time now. Even though Joel is here and Katie is nine hours away at college, we could tell their relationship was getting more and more serious. When I drove Katie back to college after the holiday break, most of our conversation centered on her and Joel. Though nothing was official, they were talking marriage and making some preliminary plans. After dropping her off at the dorm and saying our good-byes, I began walking back to my car, my eyes welling up with tears. As I pulled on to the main road to begin my journey home, I had to pull over to the side of the road and wipe my eyes, for the tears were now flowing freely. All the talk of marriage and plans for the future caught up with me as well as the realization that my little girl was growing up faster than I was prepared for.

The other day Joel asked if he could talk with me. We went out and had a glass of tea. I sensed by the way he asked and by his nervous demeanor that he didn't want to talk about cars or football. I felt fairly confident that I knew what was coming, so I tried not to make it too difficult for him. After telling me he loved Katie very much and couldn't see his future without her, he asked for my permission and blessing to marry her. My response is what I really want to share with you. I said to Joel, "Since Katie was a baby, I have prayed that the Lord would send her a man who would take care of her spiritually and physically, who would treat her right and love her. I believe you will do that." Joel is indeed a good young man who loves the Lord, and the Lord has answered my prayers for Katie. I determined a long time ago that the most difficult thing I will have to do in my life is give my daughter away in marriage. Giving her to Joel will make it easier!

My hope is that by sharing with you these thoughts about my family you and your own family will be encouraged. By the way, I pray also for my son Kyle, that he will be blessed with a godly wife when the time comes. Pray for your children every day! Pray not only for the present day, but also for the future. Pray that God will bless them with good Christian husbands or wives. When the time comes, and your eyes well up, hopefully the tears that flow will be tears of joy at God's blessings for your children.

# The Love of Christ

**David Kneip**

Where were you on September 11? How did you hear about the attacks? I'm sure you've told many people about what you were doing on that day; I'm pretty sure that 9-11 will become our generation's JFK. We'll all remember what that day held... whose class we were in, who told us, etc.

Let me tell you about my day. What's not so important is that I was at home that morning getting ready to go down to the school where my youth group kids attend to eat lunch with them. My roommate was watching TV, I walked in, we watched for a while. I went to the school, talked to the kids, tried to give them the best information I could. After I went back home, though, the really important stuff started to happen.

You see, a couple of days before September 11, a girl died here in Abilene. She had gone to school with my kids and graduated with one of our seniors last year. She was mentally handicapped to a small degree-enough to make people notice but not enough to impede her ability to enjoy life and to make others laugh. She was the sweetest person I ever met at that school, and in a strange accident, she died at her home of seemingly natural causes.

Her family went to church at one of the big Churches of Christ in Abilene, and the funeral was scheduled for the Tuesday after she died, September 11. I had decided to go, in part to support the family and in part to support my youth group members who would be there, but I didn't imagine the significance of the funeral that specific day.

Let me say that I believe that the suffering we're going through is not something that's terribly new, in a sense. It's not that the specifics of our situation are not horrific and completely devastating. Rather, I mean that our current grief, anger, and frustrations are just the trials of life magnified onto a huge scale. God understands what we are going through. To me that's very important. Through Paul he described times like this as the very groaning of creation, as though the world were in childbirth. It's not just us at these times-all of God's creatures are crying out to God to send His son Jesus to redeem His children. And while we're waiting, struggling to know what to do, God's Spirit is right there by His side, giving words to our sighs and tears (Romans 8:18-27).

But, Paul says that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that is soon going to be revealed in us. I don't think that means our struggles are meaningless; it just means that as bad as life is, the life to come is going to be immeasurably better! And not only that, we get little tastes of it right here, specifically in the church and all the good that gets done in it!

God is for us, you see, and so who really can be against us? Some people give up their lives for a cause, whether or not we agree with it; God, though, gave up His own Son for us. Nothing, then, can separate us from the love of God which comes in Christ Jesus-not struggles, not distress, not being persecuted for our faith, not economic problems, not even dying. Not planes crashing into buildings, not losing our loved ones, not even the fear and worry that bother us so much. Nothing, my friends, nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus. He loves you, He loves me, and He loves all of us (Romans 8:31-38).

I saw God's love in action in that church on September 11. We were all sitting, trying to make sense of the attacks in light of the funeral, and I watched a church surround a grieving family with great love. They talked about the girl's love for others and for Jesus, and they laughed together at the funny things she did. They committed her to their memory, as a sign of God's love among them. Nothing that day separated them from God's love in Christ Jesus, and nothing can separate us, either.

Find that love today and share it with someone else in the name of Christ Jesus.

# An Illusion of Freedom

**Peter Rode**

On March 23, 1775, Patrick Henry concluded a speech with these words: "Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!" The U. S. Declaration of Independence calls "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" the inalienable right of its citizens. In one of his inaugural addresses President Franklin Roosevelt reaffirmed this belief when he spoke of four essential human freedoms: the freedom of speech and expression, the freedom of every person to worship God in his own way, the freedom from want, and the freedom from fear.

Who can recall the moving words of Dr. Martin Luther King, "Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill in Mississippi…free at last, free at last. Thank God almighty, I'm free at last," without feeling the moral justice and power of his words? And who would not be moved by the words of Paul McCartney's latest song, Freedom, when he sings, "I will fight for the right to live in freedom. Anyone who tries to take it away will have to answer because this is my right. I'm talking about freedom…?" Freedom has always been the goal of men and nations. In John 8:31-32, Jesus said to the Jews who believed Him, "If you hold to my teaching you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." A disciple is a student and as one studies and practices the teachings of Jesus, he will be made free…free from sin (v. 34). We are either slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness. Our bondage to sin (Satan) leads to death, but serving righteousness (God) leads to life. We have a choice: sin and death, or righteousness and life.

The Jews, however, proudly responded, "We have never been slaves to anyone," yet their coins bore the image of Caesar, above the Temple gate was the massive Roman eagle (symbolic of Roman dominion). Pontius Pilate, a Roman governor, ruled in Jerusalem and Roman soldiers roamed the streets. Perhaps the freedom they spoke of was a freedom independent of political domination: the freedom of thought, action and worship. The mind can be free even in a prison, but Jesus made it clear that their professed liberty was not even genuine because, "everyone who sins is a slave to sin," (v. 34). Their hands were stained with sin that left tell-tale fingerprints on all their activities (vv. 43-47). Their hearts were devoid of any love for Him (vs. 42). Morally and spiritually they were far removed from God.

Perhaps the only thing greater

"Perhaps the only thing greater than the tragedy of the loss of freedom is the tragedy of the illusion of freedom."

than the tragedy of the loss of freedom is the tragedy of the illusion of freedom. When Jesus spoke of freedom, His emphasis was on spiritual freedom. This postmodern generation doesn't believe in moral absolutes; sin doesn't really exist, and so their so-called freedom is actually only an illusion. They are in spiritual bondage and they don't even realize it! Just like every generation before them, they have been blinded by "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4). This is exactly what Jesus was revealing to those of His day. The freedom He offers mankind is one purchased by His blood upon Calvary. It is a freedom from the bondage and bitterness of sin. It is a freedom that brings man into an eternal relationship with God (v. 51). It fulfills man's deepest longing: "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

"Free at last, free at last; thank God Almighty, free at last!"

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# Seek and Ye Shall Find

**Burl Curtis**

Some might think this promise by Jesus is an unrestricted promise, but a search of the Scriptures will show that seeking and finding are regulated. Jesus qualifies asking and receiving by saying that an earthly father would not give his son a stone for bread, nor a serpent for a fish. He concludes, "If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matthew 7:11). Asking, seeking and knocking will not get you everything you want anytime you want it because God only gives "good and perfect gifts" (James 1:17). Often, people ask for things that are not good for them and do not come close to knowing what is perfect for them.

Those who think this is an unqualified promise would do well to listen to David Lipscomb, who wrote, "We do not have enough on a question until we study everything that God has said on that subject." He impressed upon his students the great importance of not being satisfied with the investigation of any Bible subject until every related Scripture had been examined. So, what does Scripture tell us regarding "seeking?"

1. There is an order to seek. Jesus said, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you," (Matthew 7:33). Any person or group who does this will use God's blessings to provide the basic necessities for life upon this earth.
2. There is a manner in which to seek. Those who would be rewarded by God must "diligently seek him," (Hebrews 11:6). Diligence requires that we make every effort. The man who found the treasure in the field with joy went and sold all he had and bought that field (Matthew 13:44). Many do not find the great treasures of life because they seek half-heartedly.
3. There is a time to seek. Isaiah warned, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near," (Isaiah 55:6). Many times Jesus taught that a person can wait too late to seek. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house has risen up, and hath shut the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord,

Lord, open unto us'; and he shall say unto you, 'I know you not whence ye are,'" (Luke 13:22-30; see also John 7:33-36 and 8:21-24). If these words do not strike terror in your soul now, they will when it is too late.

4. Clearly, we can seek the wrong things. For instance, certain scribes and Pharisees sought after a sign, but most of them rejected the greatest sign of all, the resurrection of Jesus (Matthew 12:38-40). Also, whoever seeks to save his life shall lose it (Luke 17:33). We may seek honor from men and "not the honor that cometh from God only," (John 5:39-47). And Paul told the Corinthians, "...the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom," (1 Corinthians 1:22, 23).

5. We may seek the Lord at the wrong place. On the resurrection morning there were the women at the tomb of Jesus who were asked by the two angels, "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" (Luke 24:5). We may seek the truth from false teachers who teach the doctrines of men.

6. People may seek the Lord for the wrong purposes. The people came to Capernaum seeking Jesus, but he confronted them saying, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled," (John 6:24-29). James wrote, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts," (James 4:3).

7. And sometimes, we have to seek and wait. Jesus told the disciples they could not go where he was going at that moment, but they would follow him afterward (John 13:33-36). Those who go to heaven must wait for the "revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life," (Romans 2:5-11).

Thus, asking, seeking and knocking are not unconditional promises. If we seek according to the will of God we will find; we will seek to excel in edifying (1 Corinthians 14:12), to be unselfish (1 Corinthians 13:5), things above (Colossians 3:10, and peace (1 Peter 3:11). John understood these promises when he wrote, "If we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us," (1 John 5:14-15).

Burl Curtis was the second editor of Carolina Christian. He can be contacted at 118 Red Oak Lane, Searcy, AR 72143-4515.

# In a Plain Brown Wrapper

**Greg Cummings**

The song service is finished. The sermon begins. During the first three sentences, expectant faces look toward the preacher.

A single mother sighs, praying that her children will let her make it through the sermon, maybe even listen. An older man in failing health turns up his hearing aid. Frustrated and angry at diminishing strength and energy, he searches to make sense of his losses. A closet homosexual is saturated in guilt. A high school sophomore listens with an MTV-conditioned attention span. She is not trained to listen long. A successful businessperson caught in the depths of depression hopes for an alternative to suicide. A Bible class teacher dealing with major failure clings to faith by a fingernail. A married couple, sitting together in the pew but hardly speaking at home, hopes for renewal of lost affection. A frustrated parent of an angry teen looks for confidence. A widow's eyes fill with tears as her hand touches the empty seat beside her. A cancer patient needs a reason to suffer through another chemo session. The mate is desperate for strength to persevere. A lonely soul hopes for connection with others. New Christians listen to build faith. Long-time members hope for revival from spiritual lethargy. Debaters want a convincing argument. Condemners want a reason to feel superior. A contractor, competing with kickbacks and cheats, wonders if his ethics are antiquated. A nurse, exhausted from a twelve-hour pressure filled shift, hopes for renewal. Tired church volunteers long for a boost. Frazzled church staffers need a shot in the arm. Elders need power to persevere through the pressure. Deacons need to be uplifted. The confused seek wisdom. The guilty seek forgiveness. The sad need help. The mad need release. The glad seek rejoicing.

The preacher stands. For three sentences everyone listens intently, wondering, "Is there a word from God for me today?

Who dares rise to preach in the face of such need. Who can meet such a multiplicity of expectations? God can. Only God can. God speaks through the preacher's faltering words, stiff outlines and overused illustrations. God speaks through his words, his tears, his personality, his humor, his gestures, his spirit. God uses unworthy vessels to anoint hearts, persuade minds, lift spirits, comfort pain, and enlighten understanding. The power in preaching is not the preacher. It is God. God, speaking through a man, gives a beautiful gift in a plain brown wrapper.

God has a word for you. Shhhhhhh. Listen.

*Editor's Note:*
*This article appeared in the bulletin of the Channelview Church of Christ in Channelview, Texas, where our good friend and former associate editor Jim Mullican preaches. It is not our custom to reprint articles from bulletins, but we thought this article would be of particular benefit to our readers.*

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# Issues, Issues, Issues

**Jerry Senn**

A young preacher, I was constantly interested in learning what issues were most troubling brethren around the country. I would attend annual college and regional lectureships, which dealt with the most pressing issues in an attempt to learn how the more mature preachers were approaching the problems. These experiences were informative and helpful. Some of the issues now seem more than a bit trivial, yet they all dealt with vital biblical principles. And, applying these principles today still requires a measure of love, persistence and wisdom.

The issues to which I am referring are not those which deal with salvation directly. No, they are matters that arise among brethren who desire to work and worship in harmony. We have often found ourselves in sharp disagreement, yet we have found ways to continue to work together. Debates in past days helped to settle certain issues, but, at times, they led to division when agreement couldn't be reached on specific issues.

One should not be surprised that many of the issues about which we have been concerned involve styles of worship. There has been little disagreement with regard to the avenues or activities, such as singing, praying, preaching, taking the Lord's Supper and giving. But there have always been issues related to styles and methods, and the present time is no exception.

There are several current issues which have engendered interest regarding worship. One is whether we should raise our hands during prayer or during singing. Another is whether we should have leadership when singing that involves a "team" of leaders. Still another issue is how animated, or expressive, can we become? Should we allow our bodies to sway when singing or pat our feet to the rhythm? Is it proper to say an audible, spontaneous "amen" or "thank you Lord" during a service? And, is it "scriptural" to clap one's hands while singing?

Dealing with these and other such issues will not be easy, but sooner or later brethren in local congregations must determine the best method of approaching them. Allow me, please, to suggest a few things to think about when these matters arise.

1. All these matters fall into the category of human judgment and therefore under the instructions found in Romans 14. Romans 14 teaches that we should respect the convictions of those whose backgrounds are different than our own. One should not assume that those who value different customs with which we

are not familiar are less spiritual or less serious about pleasing God than ourselves.

2. Local issues should be dealt with locally. No group of men or women should seek to legislate for the "brotherhood" a particular style or manner of carrying out God's clearly defined acts of worship. God's word teaches what we call "local church autonomy." However, the scriptures nowhere empower individual brethren to dictate policy for the rest of us. When such an attempt is made, denominationalism raises its ugly head.

3. Local brethren should feel they have both the right and the responsibility to see that local worshipers experience a meaningful, yet scriptural period of worship on the Lord's Day. The scriptures nowhere dictate a particular style or arrangement. All things must be done decently and in order. But, some have the view that decently and in order means doing things just alike in every church, in every age. Such is not a biblical perspective. You and I do not know exactly how the early church ordered their services. Mutual edification can take several approaches and utilize a variety of styles.

4. The test of whether a particular style should be employed should not be determined by personal preference. The issue should, it seems to me, center around how the local body as a whole feels about a specific issue and how they can all make love for God and one another the ultimate test in all matters of opinion. Brethren will never impress the divided world with our love for one another (John 17:20-21) unless all members of a local body are willing to forego personal preferences and agendas for the good (edification) of the whole. It is helpful to study 1 Corinthians 13-14 and observe the principles upon which Paul bases his instruction.

We will encourage lively, participatory worship, as God wills, when brethren strive to create an environment where worshipers feel free to express themselves in ways, which reflect their own personality and cultural background. Forms and rituals must never become more important than worshiping in spirit and truth (John 4:24).

Issues, issues, issues! They will always be around to test our faith in God's word and our love for one another. Let us deal with them wisely and not allow Satan to divide us over matters of human judgment.

Jerry Senn serves the Hendersonville church as preacher and elder. He can be contacted at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28791.

# Spiritual Cannibalism

**Robert Young**

"If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other," (Gal. 5:15)

Have you thought about "spiritual cannibalism?" Physically, cannibalism is appalling to all civilized people. The complaint of 2 Kings 6:29 communicates the despair of eating human flesh, "We boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give they son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son." It's a disgusting image.

I only wish the thought spiritual cannibalism was as appalling to us as physical! In the text, people-Christians-are pictured as rushing at one another as wild beasts. When Christians bite one another seeking to injure, "gulp one another down" and consume each other, only destruction can result. This passage serves as a warning concerning the inevitable result when discord and contention exist in Christ's body. Strife and dissension are fatal! When we with ease move quickly beyond the stage of petty and personal rivalries, we endanger the church. Paul suggests that various factions, each claiming to have truth, can bring about spiritual devastation and ruin in the entire body.

It has been said, "the church is the only army that shoots its own soldiers." Paul's picture is even more vivid. Love conserves; lack of love consumes. Brothers consuming brothers destroys the bond of Christian fellowship which is so vital to the spiritual life of every child of God. We cannot hate our brothers and sisters in Christ and maintain a true church of Christ. Unless we solve the problem of living together there, we cannot hope to live together eternally. Life becomes impossible and unlivable. Hatred, selfishness, and intolerance in the end do not exalt God's people: they destroy us.

Robert Young is Senior Vice President for Administrative Services, Professor of Bible, and Director of Bible Programs at Ohio Valley College in Parkersburg, WV.

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# Out of the Mouth of Babes

**Darlene Sweet**

Yesterday, when I got home from the office, our babysitter had just about had it. Katie had been well-behaved, as she normally is. The boys on the other hand had almost sprouted horns and a forked tail from the sounds of things. Anyway, the babysitter and I had a serious talk with them before she left.

I let the boys know immediately that they would be punished. I have learned though that sometimes the thought of impending discipline can be almost as good as the discipline itself. As I got supper ready, they both said they were ready to get it over with, but I told them we would wait for Daddy and see what he thought about their day. Jeff did not get the customary greeting when he came in. It was obvious that Colton and Conner had just as soon he stay at work! Supper was solemn to say the least, except for Katie's occasional laughs-she knew they were in deep trouble and she was rubbing it in.

As we finished supper, I suggested that the boys tell Daddy what they had done all day. Colton simply said he had been really bad, but Conner said he'd rather not say. I asked them to recite the details of running through the house with eggs (they wanted the babysitter to make some cookies and they love to break eggs); climbing up on mile high moving boxes; running through the house; not listening at all; and the biggest one-Conner telling her that he listened to no one but God.

I had said that I was going to do the punishing, so I began to clean the table. Colton went on upstairs to sulk until it was over. Conner, on the other hand, decided that he might be able to change our minds. He began by telling us that he really loved us. Then he revealed that "sometimes I just can't help myself-the devil just makes me do those bad things." Trying to be serious, Jeff explained to Conner that he had to learn to help himself and not let the devil control him. Then Conner suggested that daddy and he go upstairs and read some Bible stories; that would help make the devil go away.

Cute as he was, he still was punished along with his brother. I explained to both of them afterwards that I loved them and how it hurt my heart to have to punish them. I let them know that it was okay to be mad at me-I guess I'd be mad, too. As the evening progressed, the solemness of the moment passed and the typical wildness at our house came returned. As mom sounded several warnings, I realized that Conner had disappeared into his room. Then I saw him coming down the hall carrying a big Bible storybook. He said, "Mom, read fast-the devil's back!"

If only we adults could be as aware of Satan's advances.

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# Brotherhood News

**Mark Hudson**

Thomasville, NC...Dale Mitchell, preacher for the Thomasville Church of Christ, is also the Mid-Atlantic Regional Coordinator for Eastern European Missions. Last year EEM urged the brotherhood to raise one million dollars to send literature into the former Soviet Union. The result was that more $1,185,000 was raised nationwide. This contribution funded approximately 40,000 packets that included a Russian language adult Bible, a children's Bible story volume, and other literature including "How to Start a Church in Your Home." Dale reports that 22 congregations from the Carolinas contributed $33,162.00. Dale is available to speak to churches in the Mid-Atlantic states about Eastern European Missions. He can be reached at (336) 472-6960 or (336) 476-1903. The Eastern European Mission and Bible Foundation is a ministry of the Bammel Road Church of Christ in Houston, TX. The home office can be contacted at (800) 486-1818. Statesville, NC...The Northview Church of Christ will host its annual YouthQuake August 9-11. The keynote speaker will be Buddy Bell of the Landmark Church of Christ in Montgomery, AL. Cary, NC...The Cary Church of Christ hosted the 58th annual Carolina Lectures April 7-11. This year's theme was "People of the Book."

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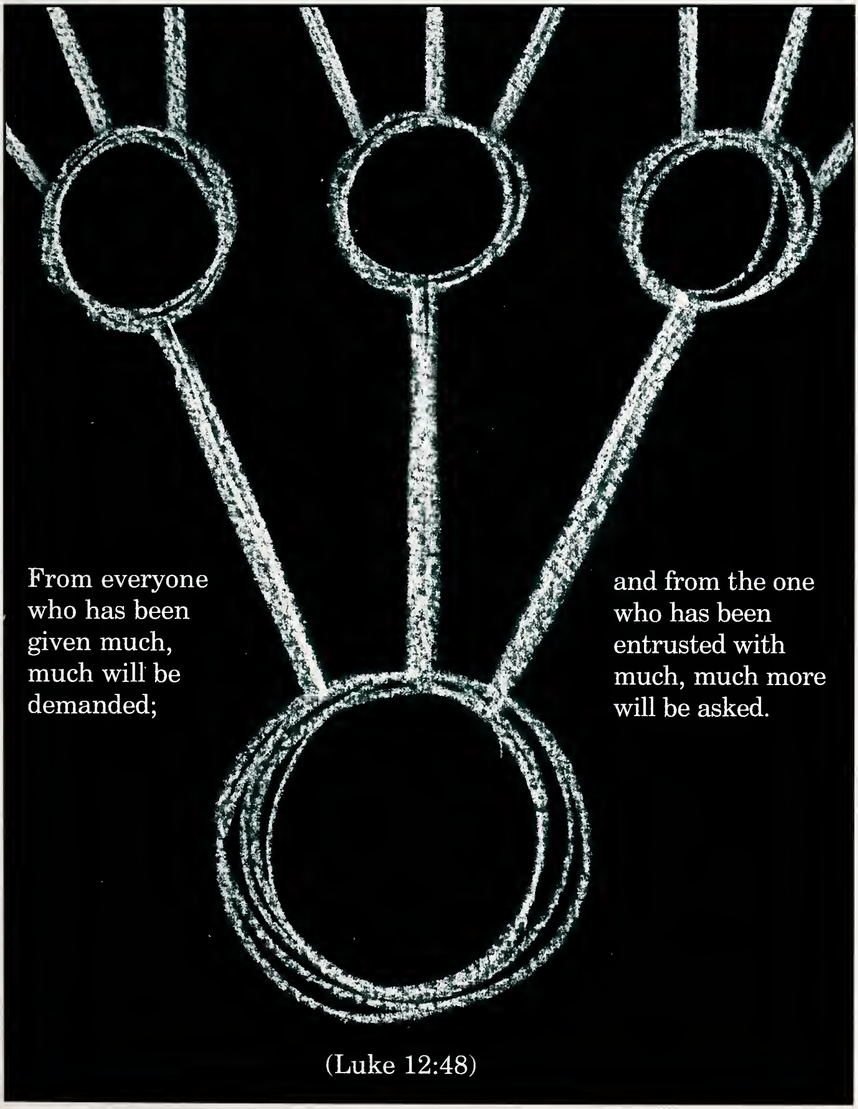
# CAROLINA christian



From everyone
who has been
given much,
much will be
demanded;

and from the one
who has been
entrusted with
much, much more
will be asked.

(Luke 12:48)

# CAROLINA christian

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# Authentic Christians, Authentic Churches

**Dennis Conner**

The Spring 2001 issue of Leadership magazine tells the story of Coast Hills Community Church in Aliso Viejo, California ("Pay It God-ward," by Drew Zahn, Leadership, Spring 2001, p.13). Inspired by the movie Pay It Forward, the church gave away $10,000 the Sunday before Thanksgiving, 2000. Those receiving the money were, in turn, to give the money away to good causes and the needy. It was a radical act of planned kindness (it's one thing to do this in the movies, quite another to do it in reality) that was intended to be a lesson on stewardship, but became an object lesson on authenticity.

The preacher, Denny Bellesi, wondered, "What would people do if they stopped to realize, 'This isn't my money?'" He preached on the parable of the talents and randomly chose 100 people in the assembly that morning and gave them each a $100 bill, saying that the church didn't want a penny back. As he gave out the money, Bellesi issued three rules: "Recognize this isn't your money; it belongs to the Master. Invest it in people's lives outside of this church body; we don't want the money back. And ninety days from now, tell us what happened."

Several amazing stories emerged. One man, for instance, wrote his college friends from thirty years earlier and shared his idea. Combined with their contributions, his $100 turned into $11,000, which was used for mission work in Africa!

Afterwards Bellesi said, "The unchurched world is sick and tired of hearing from the church. I think they want to see something. 'Is Christianity real? Show us.'" He's right. People in the world today are less swayed by propositional truths and arguments than they are by authenticity — by truth made real in our lives. They are not content to hear the claims of the Christian faith; they want to see that it can really make a difference in peoples' lives.

This is in no way to downgrade the value or importance of propositional truth. It is to say that the lost around us today (for the most part) are little impressed by doctrinal distinctives of various religious groups and are more impressed by churches and individuals who live the Christian faith in commitment and compassion. To them, it's not so much about who is the most right as it is who is the most real.

The bottom line is that if the church today is to grow and if it is to make an impact on our culture, then we must be authentically

Christian. And that means we must get off our padded pews and out of our comfortable buildings and move out into the world where the wounded and dying are. It means that we must not only proclaim what we believe (which is essential), but must show that we care. It means that our lives and ministries must be characterized by integrity and compassion. It means that we will be disciples and not merely church-goers. It means passion rather than complacency. It means that Christ will clearly be the priority of our lives. It means that we will reach out to all kinds of people and not just those we are comfortable with or those who offend us the least. It means that the things that mattered most to Jesus will matter most to us. It means that we not only have the name of Christ, but also the heart of Christ.

Perhaps Paul said it best when he wrote to the Philippian church, "For to me, to live is Christ..."

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# The Best is Yet To Be

**Ron Newberry**

Too much of life is spent looking in the rearview mirror. We see things the way they used to be or we look longingly for the days that were. Our memories sometimes play tricks on us and the "good ole' days" in reality were not good. We tend to have selective memories so that we can recall easily (and sometimes exclusively) only the best of memories. It's possible that we can be so enamored with the past — both successes and failures — that we fail to live in the present with no real view toward the future. We can spend our time reminiscing about the way things used to be or wallowing in self pity because of our ineptness, failures or missed opportunities and miss the wonderful opportunities and unique challenges that speed past us daily.

F. B. Meyer wrote a paragraph in a 1996 issue of Christianity Today that is quite instructive: "It is a mistake to be always turning back to recover the past. The law for Christian living is not backward, but forward; not for experiences that lie behind, but for doing the will of God, which is always ahead and beckoning us to follow. Leave the things that are behind, and reach forward to those that are before, for on each new height to which we attain, there are the appropriate joys that befit the new experience. Don't fret because life's joys are fled. There are more in front. Look up, press forward, the best is yet to be!"

How much of our time and energy is spent with the "shoulda, coulda, woulda" thoughts? I should have done this or I could have done that. One lesson I learned a long time ago was not to worry about things that are past that I've dealt with because I cannot change them and not to worry about things over which I have no control. In other words, to do my best to correct what I can when I make a mistake and turn control over to the one who is ultimately in control. That goes for my personal life as well as my ministry.

Paul put it this way, "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus," (Philippians 3:13b-14).

We cannot recover the past. Our future is not in the past. We cannot experience the past again. There are more joys to experience in the future than there are to reclaim from the past. The best days of the church are yet to be. God has exciting things for us to do for Him in the future. "The law of Christian living is not backward, but forward...Look up, press forward, the best is yet to be."

# Gratitude for Answered Prayers

**Dennis Conner**

Many of you are aware that my wife, Terre, was diagnosed with stage four breast cancer in March, 1999. Since that time we have been on a roller coaster ride of positive and negative reports. In October of last year we reached the most discouraging point of this journey. Scans then revealed that Terre had five tumors in her right lung, two in her left lung, and one in her breastbone. She immediately underwent a very aggressive course of chemotherapy (her third time through chemo): three weeks on and one week off. The prognosis at that time was a year to eighteen months if she did not respond and three to five years if she did (although her doctor acknowledged that sometimes things happen that defy medical explanation). We began trying to prepare emotionally for what seemed to be inevitable. It is more than a cliché that in light of such news, everyday together takes on new meaning.

In February Terre's CT scan showed that the tumors had been significantly reduced and tumor marker levels in her blood tests had also greatly improved. In April, another CT scan and another visit to her oncologist. Dr. Chrysson came into the exam room with the scan results. "According to the scan, your lungs are clear and there are no tumors." Terre, not sure she heard him correctly, responded, "You mean there aren't any tumors?" The doctor held the scan results out toward her and said with a smile, "Here, you want to read it for yourself?"

No tumors! He pronounced her in partial to complete remission, exceeding even his expectations. Terre has three more chemo treatments and she will be done, although she will continue to take medication orally for the next several years.

Throughout this journey (Terre prefers that to "ordeal") the prayer support has been nothing short of incredible. It is typical that when bad news is first received, there is a tremendous outpouring of prayer, but as time goes on people tend to forget as they go about the business of their lives, which is quite understandable. In Terre's case, however, we have experienced three years of sustained and solid prayer support all over America and Ukraine. People did not forget, steadfastly maintaining their care and support. The experience has been at once humbling and soul lifting.

To all of our readers who have kept Terre in prayer, thank you. Your prayers have made their way into the very throne room of heaven, and they have been answered. Through them you have touched our lives and for that we will always be deeply grateful. We give all praise and thanks to God for His grace and for caring readers and friends. Thank you.

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# Urgent Need!

# Times of Refreshing

**Peter Rode**

Perhaps one of the saddest stories I've ever heard was the one concerning an elderly lady in England. The bodies of two newborn children were found in her wardrobe…estimated to have been there for about fifty years. I have no more information about the story, but one can imagine the rest. The only thing more difficult to imagine is the horror and guilt that poor soul must have endured for half a century!

Can you begin to imagine the terrible toll that this has taken on her over the years? Something which every maternal instinct in her being cried out to embrace became repulsive and a constant reproach to her. The evidence of what she had done confronted her every day like a great weight growing over the years, bowing her down, aging her, a constant sickness in the very pit of her being.

Every one of us has made terrible mistakes at one time or another. Sometimes we deal with these mistakes properly, but often we don't. Like that poor lady, we hide them in the closet and close the door on them. Perhaps we don't have babies hidden in the closet, but we all have something to hide away behind locked doors. Things, which happened years ago of which few, if any, know about. Sins that we've hidden in the wardrobe from prying eyes. As time goes on, things don't get any easier; in fact, they get worse. Every day there is the possibility of being discovered. Every day when you open the door and look in, those sins lie naked at the bottom of the wardrobe and you don't know what to do about them. If you are in deep distress and agony of soul (I don't want to sound glib or trite), Jesus can deal with all those dark things you have lying hidden in the wardrobe.

Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor," (Luke 4:18-19). Then He declared, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing," (v. 21). In Peter's sermon after having healed the lame man at the Beautiful Gate, he said, "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins might be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord," (Acts 3:19). The freedom and release Jesus read about indicated that we could be freed from the guilt and shame of sin with which Satan has held us in slavery. The "times of refreshing" Peter spoke about is the renewing power of the Holy Spirit. When we accept Jesus as our Lord in baptism,

*(continued on next page)*

# Victory in Jesus

**Robert Riall**

"Now when this corruptible is clothed in incorruption, and this mortal is clothed in immortality, then the word which is written will come about, 'Death is swallowed up in victory. Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?'

Now the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks belong to God who is giving us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. As a result, my dearly loved brothers, be steadfast, unmoveable, abounding in the Lord's work always, because you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord," (1 Corinthians 15:54-58).

In 1 John 4:4 the apostle makes a bold statement: "You are of God, little children, and you have overcome them, for greater is the One who is in you than the one who is in the world." How can John make such a bold statement of superiority? Evil always seems to have the upper hand, whether in the ancient world or today. How can

*(continued on next page)*

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*(Times of Refreshing continued)*

our past is wiped out and we are given the Holy Spirit to lead us and empower us in our new life as a Christian.

There are millions of people with dark secrets hidden in the bottom of wardrobes in respectable houses. We meet them every day. Behind the quick smile and the ready laugh, there are dark horrors locked up tight that haven't seen the light of day for years. Some of these people are Christians who have never let Jesus deal with their problems.

It's time to give Christ the key to your wardrobe. Time to let Him fling the doors wide open and handle every dreadful aspect of our lives. There's no point in hiding them any longer because He knows they're in there. He knows that what is in your wardrobe may be destroying you, but it's already crucified Him. It's time to accept the great invitation, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light," (Matthew 11:28-30).

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*(Victory in Jesus continued)*
it be that we have the upper hand? The answer is that a victory was won in the past — the death of Christ on the cross. The text from 1 Corinthians is a poignant statement of the nature of our victory in Jesus.

The first aspect of this victory is its future realization. It has been won in the past, yes, but the full experience of the victory on the part of those who share in it is reserved for the time when "this mortal has put on immortality." For now, we are still clothed in this body. We still suffer. We still sin. Yet, as Christians we have the assurance of victory — a victory to be fully enjoyed on the resurrection day.

The Christian does enjoy benefits of that victory now, however. We have the forgiveness of sins, and what peace of mind this affords — no longer a separated enemy of God, but a reconciled and privileged heir. We have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us as a pledge of the full experience of our victory on the last day. We also have God revealed to us in Scripture, telling us what human life was meant to be before it was corrupted by sin.

Even now, we yearn and long for the full realization of this victory over sin, pain and death, this perfect communion with God. For this reason John closes the Revelation with these words, "Amen, Come Lord Jesus."

The second aspect of our victory is that the work has been done to secure it. Mankind stood defeated before the Law, which is the revelation of God's holy character. Man's rebellion and pride prevented Him from fully submitting to the Law, violating the character of God and resulting in God's anger toward the sin of mankind. It is a justified anger, because the holy character of God can tolerate no sin and rebellion in its presence. He would have to become less than God to tolerate it. Therefore, for God there is no alternative but to punish sin.

Before the cross, we were trying to measure up on our own to God's unapproachable holiness, thinking that our goodness could somehow make up for offenses we had done. However, because we are sinners, we just couldn't do it no matter how hard we tried. We are left with three alternatives: we could give up (which would result in death), lower our view of God to accommodate a more attainable standard (which would still result in death), or someone else could pay the price and suffer the penalty in our place.

Yet, our God still loved mankind, whom He had made in His image. In fact, He loved them (us) so much that God decided to suffer the punishment Himself instead of forcing mankind to pay the penalty. The Father (who is God) sent His Son (who is God) to keep the Law perfectly and suffer the punishment Himself in the place of sinful humanity. Result: man's defeat before the Law has been replaced by Christ's victory in life, death and resurrection. We can stop trying to win the victory for ourselves (which is impossible on the basis of law). It has already been won for us!

The third aspect of our victory in Jesus is the effect it has on our behavior. The victory that comes to us through the cross and resurrection of Christ motivates us to labor for the Lord. Before the cross, our works could only come short of the lofty standard of God's holiness. We could not possibly do enough to secure God's favor. But now, because of what Christ has done, we are free from the bondage of our works. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, our works are no longer in vain. They count for something! They can all be done gratuitously to the glory of God.

Therefore, let us walk through this world confidently. Let us stop cowering before the jeers of the world, retreating into our own comfortable corners of thought. Instead, let us launch out into the world as assured victors. We know that we cannot ultimately fail as long as we rest in Christ's victory over sin and death. We can make it our aim to bring God's kingship into every aspect of our lives — intellectual, social, emotional — as well as every corner of the world, because we know that "every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."

*Editor's Note: Going through my old files some time back, I came across a forgotten copy of the Beta Sigma Newsletter, a newsletter published by some of my preaching student classmates at Lipscomb University in 1977. The editor was Robert Riall, who also authored the article above. We thought the article was worth sharing with our readers these many years later. Wherever Robert is today, we trust and pray that his talents are being greatly used by the Father.*

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# The Biblical Message for Wounded Parents

**Norman and Ann Bales**

When things don't go the way you wanted them to go in your home, do you find yourself wondering why God let this happen to you? Perhaps you've been diligent in your effort to live for Christ. You worked at setting the proper example. Of course you weren't perfect, but you didn't abuse your wife and children; you didn't squander your paycheck on alcohol. Your marriage wasn't perfect, but it wasn't a disaster either.

You were involved in the life of the church. You didn't just send your children to Sunday school. You went with them. You made sure they attended the youth activities, sent them to camp in the summer time, prayed at the dinner table and talked with them about your faith. Even so they chose to walk away from the faith. They don't seem to value a relationship with God the way you do. They have little time for the church or perhaps they don't assemble with believers at all. Are you a wounded parent? Do the scriptures speak to the condition of your heart? Today, I want to share some passages that might help.

## God Was a Wounded Parent

The first two people to inhabit the earth went astray and God was forced to drive them out of the beautiful garden he built for them. But they weren't the last children to disappoint him. The prophets often spoke of God's relationship with his wayward children. To an unfaithful nation, God said "How gladly would I treat you like sons and give you a desirable land . . . but like a woman unfaithful to her husband so you have been unfaithful to me" (Jeremiah 3:19-20). Through the prophet Malachi, we can feel God's pain. "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me?" (Malachi 1:6). Through the pen of Hosea, God lamented, "It was I who taught Ephraim (Israel) to walk, taking them by the arms, but they did not realize it was I who healed them" (Hosea 11:3). Human language doesn't have the capacity to go beyond that in terms of pathos, regret, grief and pain. Does that not suggest that God can feel the pain of a wounded parent?

## Jesus Experienced Pain Similar to Parental Pain

Of course Jesus was not married and therefore was not a parent, but he experienced the same kinds of emotions that parents feel.

When he felt the sting of rejection, he said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing" (Matthew 23:37).

In the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15, he painted a picture of an emotionally wounded father who anxiously waited for his wayward son's return, only to experience the additional pain of an envious self-righteous older son. Children can hurt their parents in more than one way.

## Insights from Paul

When Paul imparted the gift of salvation to others, he often regarded them as his children. In 1 Timothy 1:2, he addressed young Timothy as his "true son in the faith." He regarded the members of the Corinthian church as his "dear children" (1 Corinthians 4:14).

Sometimes Paul experienced the pains of a wounded parent. When he wrote to his "dear children" at Corinth, he expressed regret that he had to address them as "mere infants in Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:1). The Galatian churches troubled him so deeply that he wondered if he had wasted his efforts on them (Galatians 4:11). Notice his troubled emotions in Galatians 4:19-20. "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!"

Sometimes he struggled in his relationships with individuals. John Mark disappointed him so much that he refused to take him along as a traveling companion on his second missionary journey. Demas, who is called beloved Demas at one point, sorely disappointed Paul when the chips were down "for Demas because he loved this world, has deserted me and gone into Thessalonica" (2 Timothy 4:9).

## How Does This Effect Today's Wounded Parents?

· God loves his wayward children and we should love ours. He didn't abandon or forsake his children when they made mistakes. He always longed for his wayward children's return. He always knew where they were and kept up with them. He continued to behave as a parent.

· God respected his children's freedom of choice. If God's children had freedom to choose between following him and walking away from him, our children do too. Love is meaningless if it is not freely chosen. When God made people he ran a risk. They had the freedom to reject him. We run the same risk when we bring children into the world.

· God is still in control. Even when we make seemingly wasteful, unwise, dangerous, ungrateful or immoral choices, God is still Lord. He will not overrule our choices, but he will have the last word. He has not lost control of the world or our family circumstances. Note this affirmation in Revelation 1:8, "'I am the Alpha and the Omega' says the Lord God, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." God will hear your prayers. He will strengthen you. He will not reject you because your children made poor choices.

## Conclusion

There is always hope. God is the source of our hope; His Word encourages us to hang onto hope. Through Jeremiah the prophet, he said, "'So there is hope for your future,' declares the Lord, 'Your children will return to their own land.'" We aren't looking for a piece of earthly real estate, but the same God who promised land to the Hebrew children, offers to be with us to the close of the age (Matthew 28:20) and said, "Never will I leave you nor forsake you," (Hebrews 13:5). God gives us strength to live with our burdens whatever they may be. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort that we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows," (I Corinthians 1:3-5).

*This article originally appeared in the April 5, 2000 edition of All About Families, edited by Norman and Ann Bales, and is used with permission. www.allaboutfamilies.org*

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# Hope Floats

**Kent Massey**

I grew up with a lot of hope.

I hoped to be President of the United States. I won't be.

I hoped to make a million dollars before I was thirty years old. I didn't.

I hoped the Tar Heels would win every basketball game they would ever play. They haven't.

I hoped my mentally handicapped brother, Tim, would be able to have a job and ride a bus by himself. He can't.

I hoped that God would heal my mom from a crippling form of arthritis and my dad from a terminal cancer. He didn't.

When hope is dashed, it's easy to feel like the patron saint of lost causes. Unfulfilled hope can cause us to question the very existence and presence of God.

Peter knew that temptation. That is one of the reasons he wrote an epistle to a church in danger of giving up their faith because of the hostile culture they lived in. He says to them:

"All honor to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for it is by his boundless mercy that God has given us the privilege of being born again. Now we live with a wonderful expectation because Jesus Christ rose again from the dead. For God has reserved a priceless inheritance for his children. It is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And God, in his mighty power, will protect you until you receive this salvation, because you are trusting him. It will be revealed on the last day for all to see. So be truly glad! There is wonderful joy ahead, even though it is necessary for you to endure many trials for a while. These trials are only to test your faith, to show that it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold — and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold. So if your faith remains strong after being tried by fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him, you trust him; and even now you are happy with a glorious, inexpressible joy. Your reward for trusting him will be the salvation of your souls," (1 Peter 1:3-9; New Living Translation).

When we are in the position of realizing our hopes won't be met, we have three basic choices:

- We can give up all hope.
- We can pretend things aren't really that bad.
- We can believe that it's all part

of God's unseen plan.

The first choice really isn't much of a choice. It is a dead-end that will lead to bitterness and despair. If we considered all the evil and injustice in the world, and believed deep down that there would be no final justice or redemption, we would quickly become embittered, angry and despairing.

The second option isn't much better. The "Pollyana" approach that everything is rosy and optimistic reflects a naïve optimism or willful attempt to remain blind to the suffering of others. Those pretenders are optimistic for themselves as they think that bad things only happen to bad people who deserve it, because when suffering finally catches up to them, the question is quick to rise from their throats, "What did I do to deserve this?"

The optimists also believe that mankind will eventually get better. If we just worked together better, got along with each other more and were kinder to one another, then humanity would change. That's not likely to happen, and even if it could, the future Utopia would not undo all the pain, suffering and crushed hope of the past.

Pretending can also cause us to make some unwise choices. We can run for, make a break and try to escape the suffering. Yet somehow it always finds and catches up to us.

Peter's choice (and the biblical one) is the third option. He reminds us that because of the cross and the resurrection, we have a hope than cannot be squelched. The resurrection has ensured for us an inheritance in heaven that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading. The resurrection is not a Christian's escape from reality — the resurrection is the reality.

It's interesting that it was Peter who wrote these words. This is the same disciple who promised never to betray Jesus and then denied him three times before the rooster crowed. After the resurrection, Peter became one of the church's great early leaders. He faced his own death (according to ancient tradition) with a request to be crucified upside down because he didn't think himself worthy to die in the same way as Jesus.

Peter wrote his words shortly before his own death. It becomes the clarion call of his ultimate hope, at a time when the Roman state and culture were trying to crush the hopes of the believers. Peter understood that the cross was not the end. In fact, it was the beginning, the beginning of something better to come.

The story is told of a woman who had been diagnosed with cancer and had been given only a few months to live. Her doctor told her to start making preparations to die, so she contacted her minister and had him come to her house to discuss certain aspects of her final wishes.

She told him the songs she wanted sung at the service, what scriptures she would like read and what she wanted to be wearing. The woman also told him she wanted to be buried with her favorite Bible. Everything was in order and the preacher was preparing to leave when the woman suddenly remembered something very important to her. "There's one more thing," she said excitedly.

"What's that?" came the minister's reply.

"This is very important," the woman continued. "I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand." The minister stood looking at the woman, not knowing quite what to say.

"That shocks you, doesn't it?" the woman asked. "Well, to be honest, I am puzzled by the request," he said.

The woman explained, "In all my years of attending church fellowships where food was involved, my favorite part was when whoever was clearing away the dishes of the main course would lean over and say, 'You can keep your fork.' It was my favorite part because I knew something great was about to be given to me. It wasn't Jell-O or pudding. It was cake or pie! Something with substance. Something wonderful. So I just want people to see me there in that casket with my fork in my hand, and I want them to wonder, 'Why the fork?' Then I want you to tell them: 'Something better is coming, so keep your fork, too.'"

The preacher's eyes were filled with tears as he hugged the woman goodbye. He knew this would be one of the last times he would see her before her death. But he also knew that she had a better grasp of heaven than he did. She knew something better was coming.

At the funeral people were walking by the woman's casket and they saw the pretty dress she was wearing and her favorite Bible. They also saw the fork placed in her right hand. Over and over the preacher heard the question, "Why does she have fork?" And over and over, he smiled. During his message he told the people of the conversation he had with the woman shortly before she died. He also told them about the fork and what it symbolized to her. The preacher told the people how he could not stop thinking about the fork, and told them that they probably would not be able to stop thinking about it, either. He was right.

The resurrection is not a celebration to be relegated just to Easter. It is an every day celebration that reminds us that the best is yet to come.

I will never be President of the United States — but I am privileged to be one of the preachers for a wonderful church.

I will never make a million dollars, but I am blessed beyond belief with a comfortable home, a good job and a loving and beautiful wife.

I have come to understand that the Tar Heels won't win every game — but it is just a game, and compared to other things that happen in life, it just isn't that important.

Tim will most likely never be able to hold down a job or ride a bus by himself — but he reminds me of the simplicity of child-like faith and honesty.

My dad and mom have gone home to be with the Lord. God heard those prayers for ultimate healing. He just chose the place of their healing as heaven instead of earth.

The resurrection has a unique way of focusing our hope. It reminds us that tomorrow is never just another day. It's a reminder that the best is yet to come!

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# Worshiping in the New Temple

**Chuck Jones**

Did you ever stop to consider that God hears your worship whenever and wherever you choose to worship Him? Why? Because God is forever with us and in us. In 2 Chronicles 7, Solomon has finished building the temple. The Lord has appeared to him and said, "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple of sacrifices. When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place." God consecrated the temple — He made it holy. And He promised that everything that happened He would hear. It seemed very convenient; when the Israelites wanted to be with God, they went to Him and He was there.

But Jesus changed all that. After He came, the hand-made temple was no longer the holy place of God that it had been. While we may consider our church buildings to be beautiful or ugly, functional or inoperable, spacious or cramped, one thing they are not is holy.

So where is God's temple now? Where is His holy place? Where do we go so that God will hear our prayers? Where do we offer the sacrifices of our praise? The good news is this — God's holiness now resides in a place much closer. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Therefore, honor God with your body."

He walks every step with me. He sees what I see. He hears what I hear. And he thinks what I think. But He leaves the choice — every choice — to me. Will I be led by His Spirit, or will I be led by my own thinking? Will I listen to His counsel, or will I take my own? Will I praise and honor Him by offering my life as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God (Romans 12:1), or will I dishonor Him through disobedience, pride and selfishness?

If I want God to be pleased, I have to live a life of constant worship and service. How? Maybe the answer is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22, where Paul writes, "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil." In worship…in praise…in life.

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# Who Do You Know?

**Dennis Conner**

Did you know that rubber bands last longer when you keep them refrigerated, rather than in a desk draw? You didn't? Or maybe you did. Did you know that peanuts are one of the ingredients of dynamite? I didn't, but that's what someone told me. Did you know that an ostrich's eye is bigger than its brain? And did you know that a goldfish has a memory span of three seconds? There are 336 dimples on a regulation golf ball. Now that's something you really do need to know! Or did you know that a goldfish has a memory span of three seconds? Oh. Forgot that I used that one already. How about this one: in England, the Speaker of the House is not allowed to speak. Did you know that?

Maybe you didn't know any of this stuff. Then again, maybe you knew all of it. And if you did, so what? It's pretty much useless knowledge, unless you end up on a TV game show. These bits of interesting but ultimately useless trivia serve to illustrate an important point: it really isn't so much what you know that matters, as who you know.

Paul understood this. He wrote, "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings..." (Philippians 3:7-10).

For Paul, it was about relationship. It wasn't knowing about Christ that mattered, but knowing Christ Himself. For that experience, he was willing to jettison everything in his life that had once mattered so much. Everything in which he had once boasted — his heritage, his religion, his righteousness — had become meaningless and worthless. Status and performance did not a relationship with God make. Knowing Christ changed all that.

That being the case, it was not enough for Paul to merely know Christ; he wanted to know Him fully. He wanted everything that the relations could offer, whether power ("of His resurrection") or pain ("and the fellowship of His sufferings"). Paul's identity became completely wrapped up in Jesus.

Is it possible to be so religious that we miss Christ? Do we find ourselves sometimes focusing more on ritual than relationship? Do we ever fall into the trap of thinking that knowing about Christ is the same thing as knowing Christ? And when we do come to know Christ, are we content to know Him casually, or do we desire and dare to know Him as fully as possible in power and pain?

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# ...You Will Be My Witnesses

**Peter Rode**

This is not an admonition. It is a future fact: "...you will be my witnesses," (Acts 1:8). The apostles were to be witnesses in the sense of 1 John 1:1. They were to be men who had themselves seen, heard, touched and experienced Christ, and were qualified and called to testify accordingly. In essence, Jesus said, "You will receive power to witness of me." That power would result not in propaganda, but in witnessing. They were not to be like salesman going out to peddle a product. Nor where they recruiters knocking down doors trying to get people to join a religious club.

Christ's power has a personal note about it. Witnessing means, "You'll talk about me, because you've experienced me." A witness doesn't deal in hearsay. He doesn't tell what he thinks or suspects. He tells only what He knows. He limits himself to what he has seen and heard. Today, two thousand years later, Jesus still expects His followers to bear witness to Him as they carry out His commission (Matthew 28:18-20). No, we are not eyewitnesses in the sense of the apostles, but we can bear witness to what Christ has done in our own lives.

A real witness is not only a witness in words, but also in deeds. After H. M. Stanley had found David Livingstone in central Africa and had spent some time with the doctor, he said, "If I had been with him any longer, I would have been compelled to be a Christian, and he never spoke to me about it at all." The witness of Livingstone's life proved irresistible.

The word "witness" is a good word and, when correctly used, is filled with meaning. The words witness and martyr derive from the same Greek word. To be a witness means to be loyal no matter the cost. It describes a way of life. All of us are witnessing to something constantly. We have no choice about being a Christian witness. Our choice is the kind of witness we will be.

Many Christians do not feel free to share their faith. Some may not recognize it as an obligation, either because of a lack of commitment or because of misunderstanding. Others would like to share their faith, relying upon some highly promoted method. When the method didn't work for them, they gave up in frustration and despair, concluding that witnessing is impossible for them. Some falsely assume that only "professionals" or "gifted" people can witness. And still others are afraid that they will not say the right thing at the right time or quote the right verse for the right need or supply the right answer for the right question. All of these factors serve to intimidate people and prevent them from sharing their faith.

*(continued on next page)*

# The Anointed Ant

**Jerry Senn**

I recently read something about the tiny ant society. Hidden underground, their nests contain thousands of tunnels through which they go about their chores. Scientists have discovered that when an ant dies, the smell of the decaying body — a chemical known as pheromonies — signals the other ants that one of their fellows has died. When an ant detects one of these signals he knows the ant must be removed from the traffic area and placed in a special ant cemetery.

A while back some mischievous scientists performed an experiment. They sprinkled a little of this chemical on a live ant and watched the reaction. When the "anointed" ant came upon one of his brethren he was dragged, against his will, to the ant cemetery. As soon as the live ant was placed on the heap of dead ants, he would crawl back into the tunnel only to be seized

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*(Witnesses continued)*

Our world is where we live, work, play, etc. The kind of mission in which the church must be engaged is basically a person-to-person witness. This is not to deny a concern for the world that reaches beyond our fences and borders, nor is it to evade our Christian responsibility in the political and economic realms of our country. It is to emphasize that mission is carried out within one fundamental context: between individuals.

The life and action of the church, including every member of the body, is based on the premise that God loves men and women. His love comes to us and continues to change us into His likeness. Integral to this continuing work of grace is the concern of God for everyone. We, the recipients of His love, become the channels through which flow the love, grace, mercy and compassion of our Father in heaven. We, the church, are now the reconciling agents who must further the reconciling reaches of divine grace into situation of human need (2 Corinthians 5:17-20). If this is God's work and we are to bear witness to it, do we dare treat it as optional, or too difficult, or impossible? Never! So the question we must ask ourselves is, "How do I rate as a witness for Christ? What can I tell others about what God, through Christ, had done for me and in me? How can I demonstrate through my life that I have, and am, experiencing God's grace?

*(The Anointed Ant continued)*

by others and dumped once again among the other dead ants. And, the process would start all over again!

Then, the scientists put a drop of the chemical on a large number of the ants in the same colony. The work of the entire nest stopped while they tried to keep the "living dead" in the cemeteries and out of the traffic area. The confusion ended when the "anointing" wore off.

This serves as a parable of modern church life. As with the ants, "signals" are important to social life, especially non-verbal ones. When "senders" and "receivers" are not understanding of one another, problems arise and no one seems to know why or what to do about it. What is worse, the good work stops until the problem is solved.

Have you had the experience of this "anointed" ant? Were you ever treated so horribly that you wondered what you could possibly have done to cause everyone to want to "do you in?" Or, have you been in the place of the dutiful ant that, trying to do right, was so far off base it wasn't funny? Your intentions were pure, but your actions were embarrassingly stupid. Both predicaments result from bad signals being sent or received. In the case of the ants, an outsider was the culprit. And whenever brethren are at odds, Satan is thrilled; his "magic potion" is working.

The body life of a local congregation is a complex system. In fact, says Ted Engstrom in his book The Making of a Christian Leader, "The local church is the most complicated and sophisticated organism in the world." I have come to believe he is exactly right.

Good church leaders must communicate well with one another and with members. Members must find ways to interact so that others are built up, not torn down — giving grace rather than bringing disgrace (Ephesians 4:29). Remember, communication is a two way street. The poor ants didn't get it. But hopefully we, on the other hand, figure out our problems when we work harder at fine-tuning our attitudes (Ephesians 4:1-3, 23).

Let's be alert, as were the ants, but much wiser. After all, we're intelligent creatures with sophisticated means of interacting! Yes, we are! Look at all our technology. However, the clever use of modern technology is too

*(continued on next page)*

# The Road to Freedom

**Dennis Conner**

"And they journeyed from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came to the Wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they departed from the land of Egypt. Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. And the children of Israel said to them, 'Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger,'" (Exodus 16:1-3).

The life of faith is a journey, a movement through the wilderness we call the world. That is precisely why the book of Exodus is so important for us today. God's great gift to us, as it was for them, is the gift of freedom. For us, it is first the gift of freedom from sin and death, then freedom from burdensome human traditions in our approach to God. As we read of the Hebrews moving from bondage to freedom we find ourselves marveling at the

*(continued on next page)*

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*(The Anointed Ant continued)*

impersonal. It will not improve communication until our hearts are saturated, "anointed," with "compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience." We must "bear with one another..." and "just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony," (Colossians 3:12-14). This kind of anointing must never be allowed to wear off. Good communication flourishes in and contributes to a loving environment.

Problems arise when we move ahead with flawed data to correct someone, to "put them in their place." Paul said, "Test everything, hold fast to what is good," (1 Thessalonians 5:22). Don't rely on hearsay or even appearances. Before you move ahead to lay hold on a brother or his reputation, examine also your own life and motives. But, when you're attacked without cause, allow the words of Jesus to ring in your heart, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing," (Luke 23:34).

*Jerry Senn can be contacted at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC.*

*(The Road to Freedom continued)*
way they responded to God's gift of deliverance; the way they behaved along the road to freedom. But the fact is, we see in them merely a reflection of ourselves. Like them, we are not always eager to fully embrace the gift; to claim this new thing that God wants to do in our lives. Many times, we simply don't handle freedom well.

Look at their complaint in 16:3, "Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt." Simply stunning! How could they say that? How could they ever think about going back to the oppression and bondage from which God had so powerfully and graciously delivered them? But are we really so different? Are we any better? The fact is that their history reads like our history; their psychology is our psychology.

How could they think about going back? How could they longingly look back? Because they, like us, sometimes preferred the comfort of the familiar to the uncertainties of living by faith. We are constantly tempted to go back to our old habits, old attitudes, old sins, and old perceptions. There is a kind of security in the comfortable ways of our past. And sometimes, we remember the past as being better than it actually was! In memory, the Hebrews ate so well in Egypt! But their collective memory was highly selective, to say the least.

Further, freedom can be risky business. For them, there would be new struggles, new dangers, new responsibilities, and they couldn't really see where their journey would take them. All they had was a promise. So, they yearned for the seeming security and comfort of the past. As for us, aren't we typically a comfort loving people? We don't want the risks; we don't want to pay the price of journeying by faith — pain, struggle, abandonment of self, transformation of character. So, we are tempted to turn back to the security of Egypt. But in doing so, we choose death.

There is, then, a certain fearfulness about freedom. We're often like the caterpillar crawling around in the dirt that watches a butterfly winging its way above and says, "You'll never get me up in one of those things!" The freedom God provides is the truest way of becoming what we were meant to be. By fearing that freedom, we run the risk of wandering through life without any real focus, chasing one illusion after another, murmuring about what God is doing and where He is leading, never finding our way out of the wilderness.

The freedom of God comes at no cheap price, requiring us to trust Him completely, walking by faith and not sight. Anything less leads us back into bondage and death.

# Knowing What We Need to Know

**David Kneip**

Have you ever gotten so involved in a TV show or a movie that you start talking to the screen? You know what I mean: you're watching a horror movie, and you tell the characters, "DON'T WALK THROUGH THAT DOOR!" Or you've got a romantic comedy on, and you can't believe that the two main characters missed each other so closely. You wonder out loud, "If only..." and "What if...."

There's a wonderful tool that people who write stories and shows use to draw you in to their tale. It's called "dramatic irony," and it's where the audience knows more about what's going on than the characters. You know what's behind the door even though they don't. You know how important it is for them to make their train because that special someone is on board. It makes you want to help the characters out, or feel more sorry for them, or be angrier with them, because you think to yourself, "If they had only known...."

There is (at least) one story in the Gospels that uses this technique, and you can pick it up, I think. In the Gospel of Mark, a major theme is that Jesus is really the Son of God. Mark tells us so at the very beginning (1:1), through the mouth of demons (5:7), and at Jesus' baptism (1:11) and transfiguration (9:7). The problem is that none of the people really get it — even the disciples — because they don't know what we know. They don't have ears to hear, as Mark would say it. At the end of Jesus' calming of the storm, the disciples blatantly ask, "Who is this?" We want to tell them, but they have to find out for themselves.

By chapter 14, the disciples' faith is really being tested. Jesus has prayed in the garden and has been arrested, at which point most of the disciples fled for their lives. Peter, though, hung around for a while. In verses 53-65, Jesus is being tried by the Sanhedrin, and in verses 66-72, Mark tells the story of Peter's denial. Read those stories one more time. I don't think this is just a story about a man's lack of faith; I think it's an encouragement to us to remember who Jesus is. You see, you know more about this story of Jesus than you think you do. And the reason is that you know the Bible.

Jesus' story opens with the witnesses against him not being able to agree. And you think to yourself, "Wait a minute! In Deuteronomy 19:15-21 it says clearly that someone can't be convicted without two or more witnesses. And what's more, the witnesses have to agree with each other!"

You read on, and there's this talk about a temple. You remember the stories of God making his dwelling place with people, about his glory coming down into one place (Exodus 40:34-38; 1 Kings 8:1-11; and especially Ezekiel 48:35b, in which the name of the new city/temple is "The LORD is there.").

Jesus' death was a great injustice, even if he had been just a normal person.

Then Jesus tells the people that they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, and you say, "Now hold on! We just read in church last week that same image in Daniel 7:13-14."

OK, so maybe you didn't remember all of that, but now you know it. And now the picture is becoming clearer. You realize that the whole story of the Bible was coming into focus with Jesus in new ways, and that while not all of the people Jesus talked and lived with figured this out, Mark is helping you to do so. Jesus' death was a great injustice, even if he had been just a normal person. Further, he was the place, the person, in which God was trying to live among people in a new way, and the leaders put him to death. And finally, he was the powerful Son of God, the one who has all authority to save us.

If only Peter knew what we knew. Then he might not have denied Jesus, do you think?

And that's our challenge. We do know. We know all those things, and I think Mark writes them to remind us once again about all those things we know but sometimes forget. Because, you see, remembering is very powerful. And that will help us to stay our course. We can be more sympathetic to Peter because we understand better his struggle. And we can also be more successful at following after Jesus because we know what we need to know.

God be with you as you remember daily who he is. I pray that that memory and knowledge will change the ways you behave at crunch times with temptation.

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# Brotherhood News

**Mark Hudson**

Wilmington, NC...The Pine Valley Church of Christ will be hosting the Pine Valley Youth Focus October 18-20. The theme is "Living Sacrifice: Take Up Your Cross Daily and Follow Me." "Sweet 16" from Lipscomb University will be featured. For more information, call (910) 791-2255.

Huntersville, NC...The Lake Norman Church of Christ announces that Rob Albright becomes their first full time preacher in June. Brannon McKnight has been serving the church and working a secular job since its beginning in 1995. Rob and his wife, Sharon, come to the Lake Norman church with 27 years experience. A graduate of David Lipscomb University, Rob recently served the Trindale church in Archdale, NC and the Thomasville, NC church for 11 years.

North Augusta, SC...Russ Jurek is now serving as the preacher for the newly established Riverside Church of Christ in North Augusta. The congregation of 50 members is in the process of selecting elders and assembles at 1147 Georgia Ave. Assembly times are 10:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. for worship, and 9:00 a.m. Sunday and 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday for Bible study. For more information, contact Russ Jurek at (803) 613-1408 or (803) 270-4745.

Brevard, NC...The 25th Annual Western Carolina Fall Ladies' Day will be held Saturday, October 5 at the Brevard Church of Christ in Brevard, NC. The time will be from 9:00 am-1:00 pm. The theme will be "A Word Fitly Spoken." The Western Carolina Ladies' Day was started by Mary Thigpen in October of 1978 in Brevard and has been an annual event held at various area congregations. This year, Mary Thigpen will be speaking, and Mary Beth Shumate will direct the singing. All ladies are extended a sincere invitation to attend.

Mocksville, NC...The Carolina's Men's Retreat will be conducted October 25-26, 2002 at the Carolina Bible Camp and Retreat Center near Mocksville. The featured speaker this year will be Randy Harris from Abilene, Texas.

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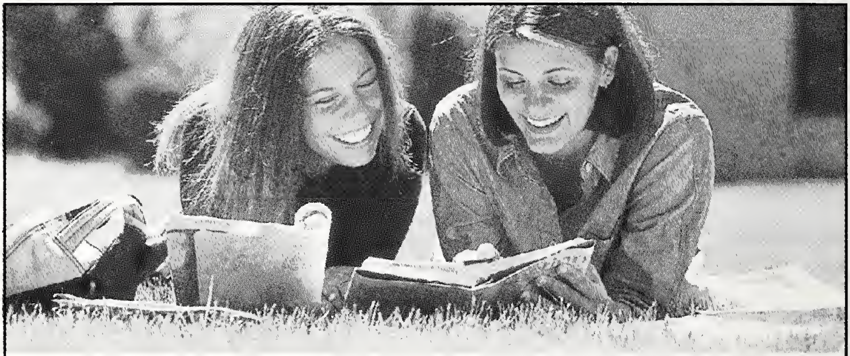

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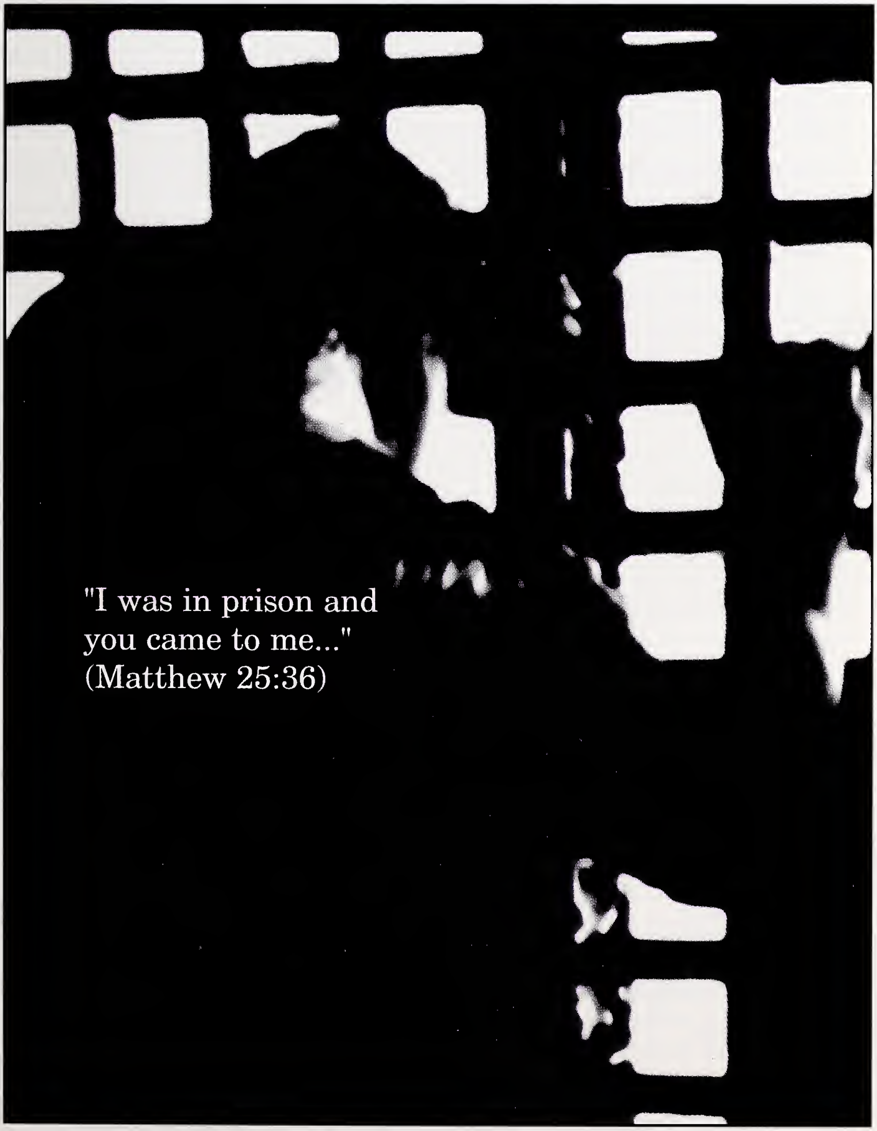

"I was in prison and
you came to me..."
(Matthew 25:36)

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# Death and Christian Discipleship

**Dennis Conner**

In his well-known book The Cost of Discipleship, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "When Christ calls a man, He bids Him come and die." With that, the German theologian, preacher and martyr (he was executed by the Nazis in 1945) has succinctly and profoundly identified the very heart and core of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. The Master Himself put it this way, "If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me," (Luke 9:23). Immediately prior to this pronouncement, Jesus had told the disciples, "The Son of Man must suffer many things...and be killed, and be raised the third day," (v. 21). For Jesus, death would be a divine necessity. That necessity also extends to the disciples of Jesus. The cross, as Jesus spoke of it in this text, was not a reference to burdens in life ("Well, that's just my cross to bear"). Rather, the cross was an instrument of death. People were killed on crosses. Jesus was saying, "Just as I must die, so must you."

> "We bury too many people alive."

Yet, despite the clear (but not so simple) teaching of Christ regarding this necessity for authentic Christian experience, there is little of death in contemporary teaching and preaching. The result, as I heard Humphrey Foutz correctly observe many years ago, is that "we bury too many people alive." That is, we baptize too many people whose repentance was devoid of death. Consequently, there is little change in hearts and lives.

Carnality — fleshliness — remains a problem. We may be nicer people, but we are not being transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Perhaps one of the reasons for this state of affairs is the sheer unpleasantness of the subject. Death, we think, is not the stuff that joy is made of. Let us focus on life! Jesus did say, after all, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly," (John 10:10). The abundant life is what we want to hear about; that's a message the church can sell to our contemporary society. But death?

What we often forget is that in Scripture the proper order of things is that before there can be life, there must first be death. Jesus had to die before He could be resurrected. For the would be disciple, that is the meaning of repentance and baptism. We have to die before we can be resurrected (Romans 6:4-5). In truth, however, baptism is only the beginning of our dying and living. Jesus spoke of a daily dying.

What kind of death, though, is this? Only the most painful kind of death. It is death to our own ambitions and ego. It is death to pride and sin. It is death to our lusts and carnal longings. It is death to our flesh; indeed, it is the gradual death of our flesh by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is death to ourselves. And each time every day that we die well, we experience the resurrection life.

Paul wrote that the driving desire of his life was "to know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead," (Philippians 3:10). Paul's ultimate goal was to experience the final glorification of resurrection to eternal life. Before that could happen, however, it would be necessary to be conformed in the present to the death of Christ. A cross for the Savior, a cross for the disciple. Death precedes life.

Much of our preaching and teaching today tends to focus on externals; in fact, faithfulness is often measured by how well we observe external forms and organization. This is by no means to denigrate the value of outward forms in the expression of our faith. It is to say that there needs to be more attention given to the heart and core issues of discipleship. We often speak of "fundamentals of the faith." What can be more fundamental than death? The ultimate soundness is that of a life truly crucified with Christ — a life devoted, whatever the cost, to the pursuit of becoming like Jesus and sharing in His experience. Even the experience of death.

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# The Pledge of Allegiance

**Ron Newberry**

"*I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.*"

This pledge that we've known since childhood was first published in 1892 as a way for schoolchildren to demonstrate their patriotism. After a few slight modifications the Pledge of Allegiance was made official by Congress in 1942. Merely a year later the U. S. Supreme Court made it a voluntary pledge for schoolchildren. The words "under God" were added in 1954 during a turbulent time in our country. During the Cold War era anti-Communist sentiment was at its peak. The Soviet Union was seen as a godless monster. President Dwight D. Eisenhower acknowledged that the nation needed a sense of a Supreme Being to provide strength and encouragement. He said, "In this way we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America's heritage and future; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country's most powerful resource in peace and war."

> "Still, 'one nation, under God' is an ideal worth pursuing and worth defending..."

The recent Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals' 2-1 ruling that the Pledge of Allegiance is unconstitutional because it acknowledges that we are "one nation, under God." The nation has expressed shock and outrage at both the judge who wrote the majority report for the court and Michael Newdow who brought the case before the court on behalf of his daughter. Why is anyone shocked and surprised? Surely any rational person with an understanding of history and how things progress socially would have to admit this has been a long time coming. It's merely the latest step in a series of efforts to remove God from public life. Someone gets offended at the ten commandments posted on the courthouse wall, or gets worked up over prayer in schools or complains that their child is being forced to say the name of God in the Pledge of Allegiance and the knee-jerk reaction is to strike any reference to God from the public domain.

The Declaration of Independence states emphatically that our founding fathers understood that our rights come from God. Men are

(continued on next page)

# This Clay is in the Potter's Hands (Jeremiah 18:6)

**Clay Myers**

*Editor's Note: Clay Myers, a Christian, is presently an inmate at the Federal Prison in Butner, NC, and is a member of the Butner Church of Christ that meets within the walls of the prison. While many people are skeptical of prison conversions and prison churches, Clay and the Butner church are vouched for by those involved with the prison ministry of the Cole Mill Rd. church in Durham, NC.*

*The Butner brethren publish a bi-monthly newsletter called Prison Epistle From Butner. They simply ask that congregations make copies of the newsletter and pass them out to their members. The brothers recently sent out a packet containing the newsletter to 206 churches, but to date only one is known to be passing the newsletter out to its members.*

*If you would like to know more about the newsletter, contact: Clay Myers #17123-056, P. O. Box 999 Granville-B, Butner, NC 27509-0999. We sincerely ask our readers to give Clay's story an open and honest hearing.*

*(continued on next page)*

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(Pledge of Allegiance continued)

"endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights..." The basic structure of our country has evolved out of this concept of God-centeredness. Take God out of the picture and we are left with a nation whose freedoms sprout from little more than the capricious desires of those in power, a concept the Constitutional writers detested and against which the Bill of Rights protects us.

The decision by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals takes exception to our identity as a nation, our heritage as a country and our intrinsic rights as Americans. However, in our diverse culture, in our politically correct society, it should not be a shock or a surprise that the erosion of our values continues. I am not against legitimate debate. I am simply against any effort to distance ourselves any further from God. We seem to be teetering on the brink as a nation. If we ever ignore-or worse yet, deliberately strike from the record-that in principle God was at the heart of the founding of this country, we will deserve whatever fate befalls a nation that is godless in its ideals.

It is true that "one nation, under God" is not a reality. We are fractured into a thousand camps. Still, "one nation, under God" is an ideal worth pursuing and worth defending if we are able to have a nation worth defending at all.

I am not big on testimonies. I have found that many times they are dangerous because of their subjectivity. However, I felt the need to share mine with you so that you may be better acquainted with me. I am not ashamed of the things I am writing to you. I now see that it was necessary for me to go through the struggles of my life in order to bring me to this point. You are my brethren in the Lord and I love you all very much. It is so ironic that my life has come to what it is today. I, too, share the sentiments of the apostle Paul who said that he was the "chief of all sinners," (1 Timothy 1:15).

I was born in Gastonia, NC in October 1975. I come from a good family. My parents, brother, and I were always pretty close. They have always shown me love and support throughout my life. In 1987 we moved to Wilmington, NC, and I began attending worship at a Baptist Church with a friend of mine. Over the next few years I became very active in the youth group there. At that point in my life, only two things mattered to me: the youth group and my love for playing baseball.

In the summer of 1990 I went on a youth retreat to a summer camp. While there, I accepted Christ into my life. Two weeks later I was baptized and became a member of the Baptist church. Over the next two years, however, I stopped attending youth meetings like I had in the past. I focused more on playing baseball as high school sports became more competitive. When I was seventeen I collapsed on the field at practice one day. I was taken to the hospital where I spent a week as they performed all sorts of tests. The doctors released me from the hospital and told me I could continue to play ball. However, the school board would not allow me to play due to liability concerns. This news completely crushed me. The only reason I excelled in school or even enjoyed it was baseball, and now that was gone. The summer before my senior year I began experimenting with drugs. By this time I had stopped attending worship. As I went through my senior year, I skipped a lot of school and my drug use continued to worsen.

In April 1994, a month and a half before I was to graduate, my father suffered a severe heart attack at the age of 46. He spent two months in the hospital and was given six months to live due to the amount of heart damage. This was the final straw for me. I did not quit believing in God, but I began to blame Him for what happened to my father. I ran from God and my drug use became heavy abuse. I began selling drugs to support my habit.

Over the next two and a half years I became very involved in selling drugs, traveling all over and thinking myself to be on top of the world. But on January 27, 1997, my whole world came crashing down. I was arrested and charged with thirteen counts of drug distribution and was held on $1 million bond. On December 11, 1997, I was sentenced to nine years in Federal Prison. What happened next brought me completely to my knees.

A month after my sentencing, my mother was diagnosed with cancer. Throughout my arrest and conviction I was concerned about my father's health, so the news of my mother was a complete shock. I had lost everything — my freedom was gone and both my parents were deathly ill. There was nowhere to turn, so I started reading the Bible some. I had run from God when my father got sick, and realized where that had gotten me. This time, I decided to run to Him.

In June of 1998 I was transferred from a prison in Lexington, Kentucky to the prison in Butner. Shortly after arriving here, one of the most wonderful things possible happened to me — I met Leslie. She worked in my family's clothing store. I would call the store to talk to my parents and would talk to her when they weren't there. On one particularly lonely occasion I asked her if she would talk to me, and we did for half an hour. When I came to prison all of my "friends" deserted me. Upon arriving at Butner I asked Leslie if she would mind writing me. I wasn't looking for a girlfriend with almost eight years left in my sentence, but I needed someone my age to communicate with. We quickly became best friends, writing to each other all the time and talking on the phone. Within two months we were in love, even though I had never seen her in person (we had only seen pictures of each other).

In 1998 my mother died of cancer. She was 48. That was the most difficult thing I could ever imagine going through, but Leslie was there for me the whole time. We were engaged in December of that same year and were married here at the prison on April 13, 1999.

Leslie was into the Bible more than I was. I was still battling with a lot of issues. In the early part of 2001 I woke up one morning and realized how much God had blessed me. Despite everything else that had happened, Leslie had come into my life. I realized that I owed God everything, my whole existence. The need was for me to be the husband to Leslie that God wanted me to be. I immediately began attending the Protestant services in the prison and became involved with every

Bible study that took place. I was on fire for the Lord! Within a few months I realized that I wanted to preach…needed to preach. I couldn't imagine doing any other thing with my life except serving God with all my heart. I enrolled in a Bible college through correspondence.

In the summer of 2001 I met Eric Hall. We began to talk and spend a great deal of time together. He invited me to the Church of Christ service here at the prison. We have a community representative who comes from the Cole Mill Road Church of Christ in Durham, NC. Eric introduced me to another man here at the prison, Gene Grassie, who also attends the services of the Church of Christ. Gene has been a Christian preacher for 35 years. He is from New Mexico and has become my dearest friend and mentor. Eric, his father, Darrel, and Gene began to talk to me about New Testament Christianity. It was exciting and new. However, it contradicted everything my Bible college was teaching as well as much of what I had learned my whole life. Brother Darrel kept telling me, "Clay, be sure of your baptism. Read Acts 2:38." So, we began to study the book of Acts. One night in November of 2001, I was lying in bed reading Acts 2:38 for the millionth time, and I saw it! I realized the necessity for obedience towards God.

Religious Services here at the prison limits our use of the baptistery. It was going to be another month or two before I would be able to be immersed into Christ. On Saturday, November 24, 2001, Eric's family came up to visit us. I visited with them for a couple of hours and then left them around 1:00 p.m. I sat outside thinking of a way to be baptized; I didn't want to wait any longer. I ran upstairs into my housing unit and found a yellow laundry cart in the storage room. It was pretty small and very dirty. I cleaned it the best I could and then put it in the shower stall and began to fill it with water. I took off for Gene's housing unit and went to his room, where he was asleep. I tapped Gene on the shoulder and he opened his eyes, alarmed. He asked, "Are you okay?" "Yeah," I said, "I found water!" So Gene got up and hurried with me back to my housing unit. When we arrived, the laundry cart was full of water. I jumped in and Gene immersed me into Christ!

Since that day I have been earnestly seeking to show people that the only way for us to know God is to conform our lives to His word. My wife Leslie was baptized into Christ on January 1, 2002. She is growing and has become involved in the fellowship at the Gastonia Church of Christ in Gastonia, NC. I

(continued on next page)

# Wheezers

**Gene Grassie**

As Christians, we are running a race. We are not professional runners with perfect form. We are not runners who never break stride, who never need a second wind, who never look back, and who never get behind. We are runners who stumble and fall, skinning elbows, knees and hands on gravel. We get grass burns, goat heads (you do have goat heads in the Carolinas, yes?), charley horses

(continued on page 13)

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(Clay continued)

have enrolled in a New Testament Christian college and have been enjoying the courses very much. This college is not an accredited school, but it is preparing me for a life of service to the Lord. The prison has a community college that works with us. I have been taking classes there and have an accumulated 3.5 GPA. I am just a few hours short of an Associates Degree. I recently applied and was accepted to Ohio University, which offers a bachelor's degree program through correspondence. However, due to the expense of tuition for both the Bible College and Ohio University, I have had to stop my classes for the present. I am hopeful that I will gain the support of brethren out there who might help me finish my education before being released.

The Butner Church of Christ has only a few members — less than ten actually. We are reaching out to the brethren everywhere to make them aware of our bonds; aware that we are laboring diligently for the Lord even in this pit of moral decay. It is our way to have some type of ministry even though we are confined in these walls. It is our hope that you will receive our newsletter and give us the opportunity to share in your ministry.

Things have now come full circle. I am a new creature, cleansed by the pure blood of our precious Savior Jesus Christ. I have become a child of God by adoption and it is the most honorable status to hold. You are my brethren in God's glorious kingdom. I have a beautiful Christian wife. These are all God's blessings, none of which have been earned. I am not worthy of any of these things that have happened to me, but God's grace is sufficient. His love far exceeds any comprehension of the human mind. We must always remain humble and realize that we are nothing outside of Christ. That God is real, there is no doubt in my mind.

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(Wheezers continued)

and cramps. Ouch! We become discouraged, lose count of laps and get lost. Our race vision blurs, our form falters, our running shoes feel like lead and we lag behind. Often we must lean on other runners just to finish the race! Sound familiar? We are wheezers!

We are not in this race alone. The devil is alongside and he is not merely a spectator. He is at the race to be sure that unexpected hurdles and water hazards are put in our path. He has many and various stumbling blocks that he throws out like a South America bola. The devil has attractive detours that lead to disaster and ruin; short cuts that promise victory and he says that we are "all going to the same place." He tells us to quit and rest, run later in life, and take it easy. He ways wheezing is a shame and disgrace and we should wait to run until we no longer wheeze. But don't listen to him. Wheezers, run on!

You say you don't feel swift? Solomon said the race does not always go to the swift (Ecclesiastes 9:11). Aesop's fable about the turtle and the hare teaches the same lesson. That is good news for us "wheezers." Paul said his life was nothing unless he finished the race and completed the task the Lord Jesus had given him (Acts 20:24). He said he was the worst of wheezers (1 Timothy 1:15).

We are to run for the prize (1 Corinthians 9:24. Check these references out; I could throw you a fake one). This race requires strict training (v. 25) in order to win the gold, the crown that does not perish. This crown is for the faithful who endure until death (Revelation 2:10). Neither must we run aimlessly or beat the air (1 Corinthians 9:26). This is no time for running in place! We must enslave our bodies (v. 27) so we will not be disqualified as hypocrites or "Lord, Lord" people (Matthew 7:21-23). We must avoid the hearers-only sand (Matthew 7:26), checking with race officials and consulting the course rulebook to determine that we have not run in vain (Galatians 2:2).

People will cut in on you during the race to throw you off and get ahead. They will try to psyche you out to confuse you and make you want to quit (Galatians 5:10). During this race get ready to fight for position, to be tripped, tricked, pushed, hedged in and gang raced. But in spite of it all, persevere. Go for the gold, the crown of righteousness. As Paul said, "...I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness..." (2 Timothy 4:7-8). Wheeze on ye joyful Christians!

(continued on next page)

(Wheezers continued)

Sins will beset us, entangle us, and weigh us down, threatening to ruin our race. But we must lay them aside and "run with perseverance the race that is set before us," (Hebrews 12:1). The racecourse is marked and we must set our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith. We are to consider Him so that we will not grow weary and lose heart (vv. 2-3). In Jesus we can be victorious.

As Paul encouraged the Galatians, do not be weary in well doing. Wheeze on!

*Gene Grassie is a member of the Butner Church of Christ. This article is taken from Issue #2 of Prison Epistle from Butner.*

**Becoming a Multiplying Movement**

*"...accomplishing a work that you will never believe!"* Acts 13:41

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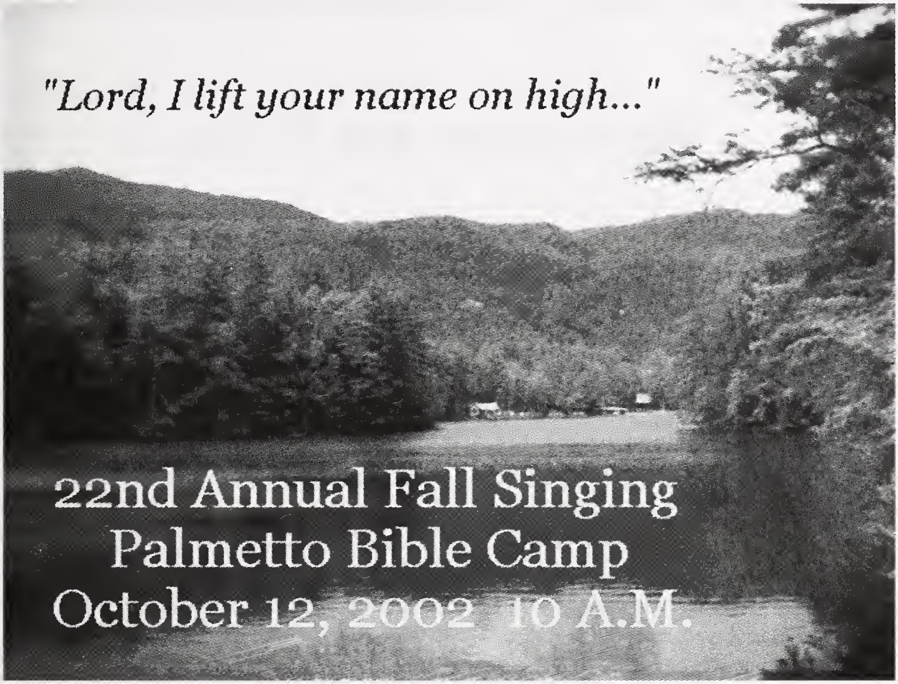

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# Remember the Cross

**Carl Etchison**

Paul Harvey tells of a clever trick Eskimos use to kill a wolf. The Eskimo coats a knife with animal blood and lets it freeze. He adds several layers until the knife is covered by frozen blood. Then fixes the knife in the ground with the blade up. The wolf follows the scent and begins to lick the blood. He licks vigorously until the sharp blade is uncovered. The wolf's thirst for blood drives him to lick the knife furiously; he never realizes it when the blood he tastes becomes his own. The wolf's appetite drives him until he bleeds to death. In much the same way, Satan sets deadly traps all around us; traps that play to our own appetites and that can lead to our spiritual death if they are not exposed.

The church in Corinth is a classic case in point. The Corinthians had allowed their fleshly appetites to cloud their spiritual understanding and disrupt their relationships. Nowhere was this problem more evident than in the way they abused the Lord's Supper and forgot the story of Christ.

No church in the New Testament was more thoroughly ungodly than Corinth. There was a Jewish presence, but the city was pagan and was characterized by three things: Greek learning (Corinth was a seat of Greek culture and civilization), materialism (as a trade center the city was ultra-prosperous), and immorality (the temple of Aphrodite was located there, meaning that there was cult prostitution).

What traps, then, did Satan use on the Corinthian church? The pride, materialism and immorality of their own culture. In 1 Corinthians Paul deals with these three traps and shows how the story of the cross, remembered in the communion meal, is the answer. The Lord's Supper, as it commemorates the story of the cross, answers three questions related to the traps into which the Corinthian believers had fallen.

First, communion asks, "Whose wisdom is true wisdom?" The Corinthians saw themselves as being so "wise," an evidence that they had been seduced by their pride. They thought smarter than Paul, as he sarcastically acknowledged in 1 Corinthians 4:10 when he wrote, "you are so wise in Christ" Earlier Paul had written that he thought they should see themselves as fools (3:18-23). For Paul, any claims to wisdom must be judged by the cross (1:20-23).

The world saw the cross as

foolish. What do we see it as? Landon Saunders once lectured on faith to college audience. He said, "God was born in a stable, did miracles, died on a cross, was raised and is coming back." Then he asked, "isn't that absurd?" How would you have answered? Saunders' answer, viewing the question from the perspective of the world, was "I guess it is." To our humanistic, materialistic world, it is absurd! But to the believer the cross is the "wisdom of God," revealing His divine genius in accomplishing our salvation.

Each week we come together to share the supper and in that act we tell again the story of the cross and declare the wisdom of God in our salvation.

Second, communion asks, "Which moral code will we follow?" Corinth was Las Vegas, Marti Gras and Hollywood rolled into one! The temple of Aphrodite was there, along with a thousand cult prostitutes. The immoral lifestyle of the city even offended Rome! One ancient writer called Corinth (with apologies to the Navy), "A sailor's heaven and a virtuous woman's hell." It's not surprising, then, that immorality was a problem in Corinth church. In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul deals with two moral failures. First, there was open immorality (a man was sexually involved with his stepmother). Second, the church tolerated it! In some sense it might be understandable why this situation existed, but Paul says it's unacceptable; and the reason it was unacceptable goes back to the story of the cross.

In chapter 6 Paul deals strongly with prostitution. The body was made to honor God, not for immorality! To be with a prostitute dishonors both body and God. His reasoning is that "you were bought with a price," (6:20). The Corinthians, then, were urged to reject their culture and follow God's holiness because of the cross of Christ.

In communion we too affirm that we were "bought with a price." The bread and wine remind us of the great price paid for us: the body ad blood of Christ! They also remind us of something else — our call to holiness. Since Jesus died for us, we are to live for Him.

Third, communion asks, "What is really of value in this world?" Corinth was one of he wealthiest cities in the Greco-Roman world and was a vital trade center. The materialism of the city apparently affected the church and the way it practiced the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:17ff). Believers would meet in homes and would share in both an agape feast (a common mal) and then the communion afterward (note Jesus and the last supper). As many of the Corinthians practiced it, the feast came to affirm materialism, not fellowship. Paul asks in verse 22, "Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing?" The wealthy went on to eat before the poor (and slaves?) got there. They were being deliberately excluded. How could Communion follow such a selfish act? Paul was emphatic, "Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you!" Then he reminded them of the story behind the meal, "For I received from the Lord that which also I delivered unto you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread..." (11:23-26). The story of the cross denounces material differences between people. The behavior of the Corinthians didn't recognize the body. Paul said, "For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body," (verse 29). Paul was not referring only to the physical body of Christ, but also to the body of believers. They failed to recognize the unity (the communion) of the church body. In verse 30 he said that some of them were weak and sickly and that some had died (spiritually) because they messed up the Lord's Supper. It wasn't doing the act wrong that destroyed them. It was that they had become disconnected from the meaning of the supper.

The cross destroys materialistic levels between Christians. The cross tells us that money and status are meaningless. Communion is a proclamation of what is really valuable! What is of true value is the cross of Jesus and the unity it creates. In Communion we are connected to Christ and to one another.

We live in the shadows of an unreal and fallen world. Sin's result is all around us: failure, sickness, and death. Sin is our reality, but there is another reality as well. At the cross, Jesus destroyed sin and the power of death. At the cross the true reality breaks into our world. In Communion we come into the presence of the living Christ. In the Communion we remember the cross and what it means. If we become disconnected from the cross we'll surely be consumed by our own appetites.

*Carl Etchison serves the Greenville Church of Christ as preacher and elder. He can be contacted at 1706 Greenville Boulevard SE, Greenville, NC 27858.*

# The Eunuch

**Jack Exum**

The story is recorded in Acts 8:26-40. To truly appreciate what I'm writing here, please pause right now to read the complete story.

Why would any person travel such a long way to worship (about three months journey by chariot)? This man was not a Jew (though possibly a proselyte), and he was black. Why would anyone spend a common year's wages to buy the scroll of Isaiah? Why not Jeremiah, or Psalms, or one of the historical books of the Old Testament? Why was he reading from the fifty-third chapter that says, "He was despised of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised and we esteemed him not," (Isaiah 53:2-4)?

To understand these questions just reflect on what it meant to be a eunuch. Castrated at birth, born to be a slave, and one who could be trusted with women. The eunuch was little more than a possession. He was a reject, despised and loathed of men. Faces would turn away as he passed. He was utterly rejected.

According to Jewish law, he could not even enter the temple to worship. "No one who is emasculated, or has his male organ cut off shall enter the assembly of the Lord," (Deuteronomy 23:1). This was the law. So why the long journey in the face of rejection and what was the reason for reading Isaiah 53?

His question to Philip the evangelist was, "Of whom speaketh the prophet this, of himself or of some other man?" (Acts 8:34). He identified with the one about whom he was reading. Rejected, cast out, scorned, mocked, and condemned! The eunuch must have seen something of himself in the one described in Isaiah 53.

Philip began at that very scripture and preached Jesus to the man. It makes you wonder whether Philip went on the in book of Isaiah in his preaching. The prophet goes on to say, "Thus says the Lord to the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, and choose what pleases me, and hold fast my covenant, to them I will give in my house and within my walls a memorial, and a name better than that of sons and daughters. I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off," (Isaiah 56:4-5).

No more shame and disgrace. No more longing to be accepted and approved. No more sighing for respect and affirmation. The new covenant, the memorial, the invitation to come within the walls of the temple and into the house of the Lord surely was the marvelous message of the master Jesus. Philip did

(continued on next page)

# Siren Songs

**Peter Rode**

In ancient Greek mythology, sirens were fictitious sea creatures (half-woman, half bird) who stood on shore and lured sailors to their doom with their sweet songs. The Argonauts escaped them because when he heard their song, Orpheus immediately realized the peril they were in. He took out his lyre and sang a song so clear and ringing that it drowned the sound of those lovely but fatal voices. When on another journey as Odysseus' ship passed the Sirens, he had the sailors stuff their ears with wax.

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(The Eunuch continued)

not preach to him about Moses, but about the Christ.

How long the preaching continued is not stated, but we know that "as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water; and the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What does hinder me to be baptized?' And Philip said, 'If thou believeth with all thine heart, thou mayest.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God.' And he commanded the chariot to stand still; and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing," (Acts 8:36-40).

Now you know the rest of the story, and we can better understand the man from Ethiopia. The eunuch, the slave, the despised and rejected is now numbered with the saints of God. He now becomes the evangel, the angel of God to carry the sweet message of salvation; not just to the elite, the privileged, but also to "whosoever will." It would be enlightening to know what happened in his home country of Ethiopia and how many he was able to bring to salvation with the scroll of Isaiah.

So it is with every believer. Christ declared, "All power has been give unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," (Matthew 28:18-20). Salvation is for all! Praise God!

*Jack Exum can be contacted at RR 4 Box 215, Lake City, FL, 32024-9337.*

(Siren Songs continued)

He had himself tied to the mast for he wanted to hear their beautiful voices. The Sirens sang when the ship approached, their words were even more enticing then the melody. They would give knowledge to every man who came to them, they said, ripe wisdom and a quickening of the spirit. Odysseus' heart ran with longing but the ropes held him and the ship quickly sailed to safer waters (Odyssey XII, 39). The sailors' ruin wasn't caused by the song itself, which seemed so innocent and beautiful, but by the self-destructive behavior that it caused — jumping overboard to drawn, or demolishing their ships by sailing them straight into the rocky shoreline.

"Not everything that tastes good, is good for us," is a beneficial old saying. "Not everything that sounds good, is good for us," could be another. "Everything is permissible," but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible," but not everything is constructive (1 Corinthians 10:23).

Because of our sinful propensities, even when sincerely trying to obey God, we are sometimes more inclined to act according to the beliefs and opinions that seem right to us, or that are most convenient, rather than the words that are right from God. We tend to listen to sweet songs of the sirens rather than the saving advice from God. But can any human be more right than our Creator? Or even as right? There are many texts relating to the value difference between God's word and human philosophy. Here are a few:

- "They worship me in vain, their teachings are but rules taught by men. You have let go the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men," (Mark 7:7-8).
- "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient," (Ephesians 5:6).
- "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ," (Colossians 2:8).
- "They say to the seers, 'See no more visions!' and to the prophets, 'Give us no more visions of what is right!' tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions. Leave this way, get off the path, and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel!'" (Isaiah 30:10-11).

The English word "counterfeit" originates from two French words

(continued on next page)

# Letter 279 From Uganda

**Shawn Tyler**

*The following letter is from Shawn Tyler, a missionary to Uganda. Shawn, who is from Texas, went to Kitale, Kenya in 1981, and moved to Mbale, Uganda in the mid 1990's. His wife is Linda. They have two children, Noah and Natalie. We thought our readers would be encouraged by this powerful testimony to the power of the gospel of God.*

I have to admit that I was a bit skeptical driving up to Bumboyi on Friday. Two visits by Ugandan evangelists reported a strong Muslim community without a single church in the parish (ironically named in this case, it means a smaller section of a sub-county). Bumboyi is only four miles from town. It is nestled on the foothills of Nkokenjeru. The high cliff that overlooks town and makes up part of Mount Elgon's base. As I drove up, I came closer to the three waterfalls cascading from the cliff and gained a beautiful view of a town lying on the edge of a large flat plain to the west.

Our first contact for Bumboyi is a man named Ali Muniafu, a business man who sells corn flour, sugar, and other basic food commodities (continued on next page)

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(Siren Songs continued)

meaning "to make" and "against." Its dictionary definition is "made in imitation of something else, with the view to pass the false copy for genuine or original." In the case of counterfeit money, it may appear perfectly genuine — it could perhaps even deceive an expert who isn't paying close attention — but it is actually both worthless and illegal. In the end, it will only cause loss for the one who happened to get stuck with it. The same is true for anything, or anyone, attempting to take the place of God's word. God's word can always be trusted, regardless of whatever sweet song someone may dream up to disagree with it. The Scriptures are the compass that keeps our faith off the rocks. Jesus Himself, in His prayer to the Father just before His arrest, said, "Sanctify them by the truth, your word is truth," (John 17:17).

My hope and prayer is that you will always be listening to the voice of God rather than the voice of sirens; that we will always want to build our lives on the rock and not the sand (Matthew 7:24-27).

*Peter Rode can be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.*

(Uganda continued)
from shop 36 in the market section of town. He sent his children to our town church for the past few months with the hope that we would come visit him at home. Even though Ali has grown up in a Muslim community, he has agreed for us to baptize his children and give them Christian names. The earlier visits reported to me that Ali and a large group of adults in Bumboyi wanted us to come and start a church (this may mean build it for them), a clinic, and a nursery school.

As I drove up, I began to outline a sermon that I have preached on many occasions. In my mind, my voice was cynical and tired. I secretly wondered if I was just wasting my time, but I had promised to go, so I did not want to break the date.

To make matters worse, my guide did not show up. As I waited for him, the time to go came and passed. I drove down to the town church building hoping that he was there. He was not. I began to waver in my determination to go. Then I drove over to Ian's house and found one man, Robert, who knew where Ali's house was. I finally decided to go with him as the rain clouds gathered over Nkokenjeru. My heart was not really in this trip.

The drive up was not difficult. As I rounded each turn, I marveled at Gods beautiful creation. The heavy rains over the past few days made the waterfalls larger than normal-swollen and white against the darker cliff walls. The green of the vegetation was vibrant in the morning sunlight. Without doubt Uganda is a very fertile country. Everywhere I looked, I saw food growing.

In a small trading center, we turned right at a school sign. The path was slick with mud and the tires spun a little as I navigated the steep incline. We drove about 400 yards and parked in a small schoolyard teeming with preschoolers. From the car we walked about 100 yards down the side of the hill to Ali's house. Already a small group of older men was waiting. They were sitting outside in the sun visiting with one another. I noticed a large amount of white hair. A couple of men had glasses with thick lenses.

Ali met us at the edge of his compound. He is about five feet seven inches in height. He is heavy set with a round face and big smile showing large front teeth. He grabbed my hand with both of his and shook vigorously. I could tell instantly that he was genuinely happy to see me. We were escorted to two metal chairs outside with the other men, but we didn't sit long before we were taken inside for breakfast. We climbed the broken step into the living room. It was a mud walled room with wooden shutters for windows and a wooden door. The room was barely large enough to have two couches against opposite walls facing each other with a small coffee table in between. There were no pictures on the walls. A small table at the end of the room had an unusual collection of stuffed animals, wooden carvings, and knick-knacks. Still, the sofa sets gave me the impression that Ali was a little richer than the average Ugandan. Within a few minutes hot, milky tea was brought out. Another tray of bananas and sliced bread was produced. Then to my surprise, another bowl of roasted chicken was set before us. Robert and I were the only ones to eat. All the other visitors sat outside patiently waiting for us to finish. Ali busied himself with household chores. He came to sit and visit with us about the time we finished.

Back outside, Ali gave everyone a chance to introduce themselves. Each person stood and gave his name and where he lived. Only three of them mentioned being a Christian. When they finished, Ali gave a small presentation that melted my heart. With as sincere a voice as I have ever heard, he said that within their whole parish, not a single church existed. Anyone who wished to be a faithful Christian had to walk all the way into town to attend services. Many felt it was time for a small church to start in their area.

Then Ali gave me the greatest insight into how we as Christians can reach the Muslim community. It would not be with Biblical, exegetical lessons proving obscure points. Ali said that since his children had been coming to church, he had noticed a marked difference in their behavior. This change was very pleasing to him and his wife. Others among the group expressed the same thing about their children who also attended with us. Second, Ali said he had noticed that Christians helped each other and expressed more love in difficult times than any Muslim community that he knew. These two actions so impressed Ali that he was willing to let his children continue with us. It also proved to him that we should be the ones to come up to Bumboy and help them start a church. He said, "Our children just may be the door for us to enter the church as well."

I was given a chance to speak. I scrapped my earlier cynical speech and went with something more appropriate. I pulled six examples from the Bible where Jesus is called the Son of God by different witnesses. I got them to repeat the witnesses with me and give the entire list when I finished. I ended by telling them that no church in

(continued on next page)

# The Storm

**Darlene Sweet**

I was very thankful to have heard our preacher's lesson on a Sunday last summer regarding the storms of life. I was also fortunate to have been amazed at the recitation of by a precious young man of the Biblical account of Jesus calming the storm. Both would prove to be timely. This past summer, our family was enjoying a beautiful day on Old Hickory Lake. We were tubing and racing around in the glorious beauty of the lake. I had finally talked my mother and stepfather into coming on the boat with us, even though my mother is terrified of water and she is not a swimmer.

After a while we pulled into a cove to have our lunch and anchored down. We had noticed some dark clouds in the sky and

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(Uganda continued)

Bumboy would succeed if they did not believe Jesus was the Son of God. The entire group confessed Jesus as the Son of God.

The next event also touched me. We climbed back up to the pick-up and drove a short distance further up the mountain. On a hillside with a breath-taking view, the small group of adults showed me a piece of land that they were ready to give for the church building. The plot had a small stream running down the side of it and was full of beans and banana trees. A small patch of tomatoes grew down by the stream. They had marked out the plot and were ready to sign papers to hand it over to our mission. One man even remarked that the stream could be dug out a bit and made into a great place to baptize.

As we walked back to the truck, the whole group pressed me to come back next week. They said they wanted a regular weekly Bible study at 9:00 a.m. each Saturday morning. They showed me a place under some trees where they wanted to meet, and they introduced the man who would make sure the place was swept and clean each week. By this time I was so overwhelmed that I agreed to return on Saturday.

Driving home I felt like the reluctant prophet unwilling to do what God had called me to do. I returned home very humbled, less cynical, and just a little more open to preach to anyone God might send my way even if he is a Muslim named Ali.

Oh, God forgive me, and thank you for reminding me how powerful you really are.

(The Storm continued)

had gone out of the way to avoid them. The water began getting rough and the anchor was not holding us very well. There was no rain, but the water started tossing us about rather roughly. I am not one to panic, but my heart began to race when Jeff began handing all of the adult life vests (all of the children have one on as soon as their feet hit the dock!) My mother had a look of utter terror on her face. Next came the rain! It was falling so hard that it felt like little needles on our skin. We all huddled under the back canopy of the boat, while Jeff drove frantically to try and get us back closer to the marina. There was panic all over the lake. Boats were racing about trying not to collide. By this time, the children are beginning to realize this is not a fun, fast joy ride, but pretty serious. The boys were beginning to cry. Katie was totally still as if she were in shock. I found myself praying that God would see us through this storm. I found myself recalling the story of Jesus calming the sea. By God's grace, we reached the dock safely, although we looked like drowned rats. We hurried out and into a warm, safe car. The wind continued to howl and the rain poured. We were okay and on our way home. By the time we reached our house, the sun was shining again through the clouds. After a shower and dry out, we were none the worse for the wear. (Although, I am not sure my mother will ever go boating again)! Jeff, the children and I ended up going back on the lake later last evening to view the fireworks from downtown. It was a beautiful and peaceful evening. Today I have been thinking about that storm and the overall storms that we all experience in life. We need to realize the beauty of a united church family, and not let the tossing about of angry words, opinions and traditions mar that beauty. We need to let our faith be our anchor and realize that if we hold fast to our truths and faith, nothing will shake us. We need to realize that rain is always temporary and that the sun will shine again. We must have fellowship with our brothers and sisters and be able to "huddle" together during times of storm. We need to lead our youngsters with confidence, love and enthusiasm. They never need to see us give in to the rages of a storm. We need to know for certainty that prayer will see us through any storm of life-physical or spiritual. We need to make sure that we always have an eternal life vest and hold on to Christ, as by faith we ride out the storm.

*Darlene Sweet and her husband, Jeff, have three children: Katy, Colton and Conner. She can be contacted at 5820 Craft Rd., Joelton, TN 37080.*

# Palmetto Bible Camp Annual Fall Singing

"Lord, I lift your name on high..."

If you love singing...I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High, Psalms 9:2. If you are amazed by the beauty of fall colors of the Blue Ridge Mountains...let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the LORD, Psalms 96: 12-13. If you could spend a Saturday eating great bar-b-que...God has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy. Acts 14:17. Then we have a day for you!

For the past 21 years, on the second Saturday in October, sisters and brothers in Christ, have enjoyed a few hours together. We have witnessed the beautiful colors of Autumn in the Blue Ridge Mountains. We have sung the old songs, you may remember some from the "blue book". We have sung the new songs, "Lord, I lift you name on high...".

Or maybe you just miss the monthly "area singing" that would rotate from congregation-to-congregation. For these reasons (and many more), we invite you to join us on Saturday, October 12th at Palmetto Bible Camp. You can sing your heart out, eat some tasty bar-b-que, and praise the God who made it all. If you need more information about the day, please call Ernest or Mary Thigpen at (864) 486-9422. If you would like to stay a night or two, please call Blake Nicholas at (864) 476-9297. The bar-b-que is $10.00 per person and any profit will go to purchase safety equipment for camp.

Now stop for a moment and listen...you may hear the songs echo through the mountains..."There is beyond the azure blue...", "Jesus is Lord...", "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound..."

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# Weddings

**David Kneip**

In the last few weeks, I have had the privilege of attending the weddings of two very close friends of mine. The first was back in the great state of North Carolina, and the second was here in Texas. Let me tell you a little about them.

The first wedding was between two friends of mine from college days. Both are older — late twenties, early thirties. They are fairly settled in life and have lots of friends from lots of different places. Their wedding was very elegant - stylish, warm, and immaculate. The food was wonderful; certainly more than this college guy is used to eating on his own! The groom and his men were polished and handsome, and the bride was absolutely beautiful.

The second wedding was quite different. This one involved a girl five years younger than me from my home church. She and I are friends at college now, and her new husband is about her age — early twenties. They are about to graduate from college and begin work as youth ministers. Their wedding was very homey with lots of friends from churches and college. It was outside at a friend's ranch — lots of green, a little creek running by, and barbecue to eat for supper! The wedding party was very exuberant. The girls were all so excited for their friend getting married, and the groom and his men were alternately as serious as the men they are becoming and as playful as the boys they have been. The bride was, again, absolutely beautiful.

Did you notice that last item in both of my descriptions? To my mind, the two weddings were very different in almost every respect. Of course, so were the couples! But the thing that both had in common was that the brides were lovely, all decked out, made up, dressed to the nines - the glory of God's creation for just a little while those days. Their husbands love them very much - not because they were dressed up on the outside, but because they love their beauty on the inside.

And that is how God loves us, as individuals and as the churches of his kingdom. Paul connects the relationship between a husband and a wife with that of Christ and the church in the book of Ephesians (5:22-33). And John, in Revelation 21:1-2, describes the new Jerusalem, the city of the assembled people of God, coming down out of heaven like a bride prepared and beautifully dressed for her husband. These images are wonderful - they tell us that our relationship with God is to be as close as that of a bride and

(continued on next page)

# The Fear Factor

**Kent Massey**

Ophidiophobia (fear of snakes).
Musophobia (fear of mice).
Cynophobia (fear of dogs).
Homiclophobia (fear of fog).
Ergasiophobia (fear of work).
Phonophobia (fear of speaking aloud).
Pogonophobia (fear of beards).
Phengophobia (fear of daylight).
Achluophobia (fear of darkness).

If this list is any indication, then there are a lot of folks with a lot of fears. Yet, fear is nothing new to the human experience.

One of my favorite stories from the life of Jesus is taken from the gospel of Mark. "That day when evening came, He said to His disciples, 'Let us go over to the other side.' Leaving the crowd behind, they

(continued on next page)

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(Weddings continued)

groom. We don't hold anything back from God, and he comes to us intimately as we spend time with him, both alone and with others.

But how do those connect with weddings? A couple of things come to mind for me. First, the lives that we live in the world ought to be as beautiful as a bride on her wedding day - spotless and unblemished. That goes for us as individuals and us as churches. My mother's favorite Bible verse in the whole book is Matthew 5:13-16, culminating in Jesus' encouragement that we should let our lights shine before men, that they might see our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven.

Second, when we do fail to love and serve our Bridegroom as we'd like to and as he would like us to, he is as quick to forgive and restore his love as a love-struck bridegroom on his honeymoon — and even more so! God extends his love to a thousand generations of those who love him (Deuteronomy 5:8-10 and other places).

Finally, just like earthly brides, we are loved not so much for what we look like on the outside as for the people we are on the inside. God has made us in his image, and that is something that is stamped upon our hearts forever - it can't fall off, rub off, or go away. And God loves us deeply, even if and when the world disfigures us in whatever way it will.

Remember, you (singular and plural) are God's bride. Just like Jesus at the wedding of Cana, he can take the common water of our lives and turn it into the best wine to cheer other people's hearts. Let's do our best to be good wives!

(Fear Factor continued)
took Him along, just as He was, in the boat. There were also other boats with Him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke Him and said to Him, 'Teacher, don't you care if we drown?' He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!' Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to His disciples, 'Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?' They were terrified and asked each other, 'Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey Him!'" (Mark 4:35-41).

That story has become one of my favorites because it hits so close home in my life. I can imagine Jesus standing up with His arms wide and stilling the storm. I can also imagine what it would have felt like as the winds died down and calm descended to hear Jesus turn to His companions and chastise them. Their reaction in the storm revealed the shallowness of their faith. Although they had been invited by Jesus as fellow journeyers on this junket, they missed the boat!

It would have been a thrill to witness this miracle. But the real miracle that Jesus wanted them (and us) to see was not that of calming the storm, but the miracle of calming them in the storm. They had a real faith opportunity to learn that with Jesus there is no storm too fierce, no opponent too great, and no crisis too complete. The disciples lost out on a chance to experience the jubilation, the exhilaration that could have been theirs if they had the courage to ride the waves of that storm with Jesus. Instead, their fear had Jesus shut the ride down and get them safely into port.

I need a faith that is willing to sail with Jesus. None of us can experience the true joys of trusting Jesus if we just dry-dock our faith. We always want the safe way and that way keeps us land-locked. And if we dare to tack our sails, we are content to stay in the shallows and afraid to drift too far from land because the current may grab us and take us in a direction we aren't sure we want to go.

Following Jesus often means leaving our safe, snug harbors. Jesus always kept moving throughout His ministry, always pushing the disciples along to the next town or grabbing a boat to jaunt to a new shore. Jesus doesn't call us to live within our limits. He challenges us to live unto our limits. That was the clarion call to His people — to go everywhere, be everywhere, to hit the road and sail the seven seas. How else would we fulfill the directive of "go to the ends of the earth?"

The story of Jesus calming the storm testifies to several truths. First, the disciples were caught in the middle of the storm because they obeyed. The storm did not hit them because they were disobedient or out of God's will. They were right where they needed to be for God to work a miracle in their lives.

Second, it highlights the paralyzing effects of fear. Fear will take away your options. Fear makes you believe there's no other way and no other door and that God doesn't care what is happening to you. It's interesting that the disciples woke Jesus with the cry, "Do you not care that we perish?" Fear also promotes self-destruction and it causes us to lose all hope of ever making it through.

Last, just because Jesus is in the boat doesn't mean that we won't encounter storms. Jesus never promotes a "health and wealth" gospel. A peaceful voyage is not the ticket Christians travel on. Because we live in a fallen world, we are in for some rough times and the storms are very real and powerful. But the storms don't have the last word.

John Henry Faulk tells the story of his early childhood, growing up with his cousin, Billy, deep in East Texas. John Henry said that as nine-year-old make-believe Texas Rangers, they were the scourge of all bandits, robbers and desperadoes when they rode their trusty stick horses on the range between the kitchen door and the corncrib.

One day, John Henry's mother sent them out to investigate a commotion in the henhouse. They cautiously entered where all the chickens were squawking and fluttering around and began to examine the nests. About half way through their investigation, as they peered into a nest, a black snake raised its head about six inches from their noses. John Henry remembers how all of their make-believe heroism fell away as they made a new door in the side of the henhouse!

When John Henry's mother questioned them about the incident, she wondered how the two bravest lawmen in East Texas could be afraid of a harmless snake, adding, after all, that everybody knows a black snake can't hurt nobody! To which young Billy replied, as he rubbed his bruised head and backside, "Yes ma'am, but they sure can cause you to hurt yourself."

Fear doesn't have to be our last resort. Jesus may not always still the storm, but He will steel us for the storm. We can have a peace-filled journey with Jesus always present. His promise is not to sail us around every storm, but to bring us through all storms — still in one piece!

*Kent Massey can be contacted at 4900 Providence Rd., Charlotte, NC 28226.*

# But Mema

**Rita Watson**

Our niece Amber was what most people would call a "special needs child." She always had a problem processing information. Consequently, the family found itself repeating anything we wanted to tell Amber and then saying, "Do you understand?" One day, Mema told Amber that she couldn't do something. She repeated the information and then said, "Amber, do you understand?" Little Amber's response was, "But Mema, I don't want to understand!"

Ah, out of the mouth of babes! Amber knew at a tender age that if she understood what Mema was saying, then she would be responsible for her actions. How often in our relationships with God and others do we purposely fail to understand because we don't want to be responsible?

In our relationships as husbands and wives, once we understand the likes and dislikes of our mates, we become responsible to behave in a courteous manner. Once we understand their physical limits, we become responsible to not expect more than they can do. Once we understand the needs of our families, we are responsible to meet them to the best of our abilities. In other words, we are responsible for our actions in these relationships.

The same is true with our relationship with God. Once we understand who God is, what His personality is like, what He wants from us as His children, we become responsible for our actions toward Him.

The apostle Paul tells us that the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. They were given the law of Moses and were responsible for keeping that law and would be judged by that law.

As God's children today the more we know about God, the closer we become to Him and the more we are responsible to be like Him. Perhaps that is why James said, "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness," (James 3:1). With knowledge and understanding comes responsibility.

But sometimes, like little Amber, we don't want to understand. We may not be like the pagans of Romans 1 who refused to acknowledge God, or even the Jews who perverted the law to their own purposes, but do we listen to what God is saying to us in His word? Are we willing to have open eyes and ears as we read and listen to the Bible? Are our hearts

(continued on next page)

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# Brotherhood News

**Mark Hudson**

Duncan, South Carolina... Fire Destroys Group Home. In the dark hours of Sunday night, July 28, a disastrous fire destroyed the oldest group home on the Duncan campus of Southeastern Children's Home.

The fire was apparently started from an electrical failure in a table lamp and was extinguished by the Duncan Fire Department. A few hours later, however, the fire erupted again and completely destroyed Smith Cottage. Fire and Police investigators have determined that the second blaze was deliberately started by an arsonist (it is assumed someone monitoring police and fire radios).

Robert Kimberly, Executive Director of Southeastern Children's Home, expressed thanks to God that the children and their house parent family were all safe. However, their personal belongings were destroyed in the fire, including many irreplaceable items of sentimental value. The residents of Smith Cottage are now living in the group home in Lyman, SC. "Although the house and contents were insured, we have still not determined what the replacement cost will be or what portion of that cost will be covered by insurance," Kimberly said. "There is no question," he continued, "that we will replace this house and continue the important work of caring for children in need." He also noted that, even with a generous insurance settlement, there will be considerable cost involved in rebuilding and resuming a full range of activities.

The agency has already received numerous calls and inquiries about how people can help with this tragic loss. If you would like to offer your help, call (864) 439-0259.

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(But Mema continued)

soft, so as to be convicted of our responsibilities toward God and our fellow man? Or do we purposely cloud our minds so that we don't see the opportunities that God places before us? Do we refuse to believe that certain passages could pertain to us? Do we in effect tell God, "I don't want to understand?"

*Rita Watson can be contacted at 2163 Oak Grove Rd., Red Boiling Springs, TN, 37150.*

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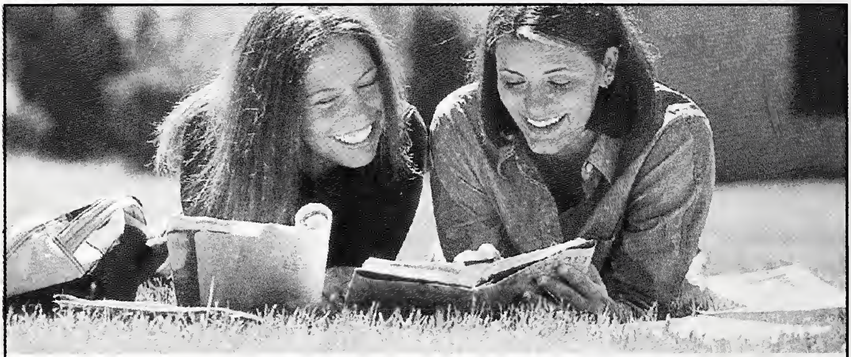

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# CAROLINA christian

LOVE THE LORD YOUR
GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART
SOUL MIND
STRENGTH

Luke 10:27

AND LOVE YOUR
NEIGHBOR
AS YOURSELF.

# CAROLINA christian

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# Would We Be Neighbors?

**Dennis Conner**

An article titled "A Solitary Death" (by Sherry Wilson-Youngquist) in the Winston-Salem Journal of September 24, 2002 did more than arrest my attention — it pierced my heart. Perhaps that was because just the Sunday before I had preached on "Neighborly Love" from the parable of the Samaritan neighbor in Luke 10, and was struck by that curious timing. Or perhaps it was because the article served to remind me of how often I have failed to practice what I had preached.

The article was about the death of a 30 year old homeless man named Robert Cantrell, Jr. He had died alone in an abandoned house in Elkin, NC, just 15 miles up the road from where I live and preach. Cantrell was a troubled young man who had not been able to kick addiction to drugs and alcohol. He had been in and out of jail and treatment centers over the past few years. Cantrell was also diabetic and was not taking his insulin properly. He told a lady who had befriended him that he mixed his insulin with water to make it last longer since he couldn't afford to buy it. In fact, medical examiners speculated that it was complications from diabetes that finally killed him. His body was found on the back porch of an abandoned house a month after he died.

> "The priest and the Levite (those who should have known better) were denying the fundamental worth of the man on the other side of the road."

Cantrell's parents had both died when he was a boy and he was estranged from his sister and extended family when he died. As the article stated, "Because his substance abuse often caused pain to those he loved, he lived alone. And he died alone."

My point here is not to arouse sympathy, as such, for someone that most would have viewed as a shiftless drug addict and petty criminal. It is, on the other hand, to explore in a real, (not theoretical) way what it means to be a neighbor.

Deborah Alexander was a single mother with three children who briefly befriended Cantrell. The photo in the paper showed her to be a slender, African-American woman holding her youngest child in her arms. Her face gave the impression that she was well acquainted with the hardness of life. She met Cantrell as he walked past her house one Friday afternoon. He was pale and dehydrated with dark circles under his eyes, but she invited him to sit and talk a while. He told her that he had been staying in the abandoned house across the street for a couple of weeks. They talked until time for Miss Alexander to put her children to bed. And then they talked some more, until 2:00 a.m. She offered for him to stay the night on her couch, intuitively trusting him. Indeed, Cantrell was no trouble and repeatedly thanked his neighbor.

The next day she fixed him a sandwich, but he was unable to keep it down. Deborah told Cantrell that he looked like he needed to get to a hospital. Having no phone, she gave him some change and directed him to a pay phone where he could call 911. He went back into the house to collect some papers before leaving, and that was the last she saw of him. His badly decomposed body was found in the abandoned house on July 8.

In the parable in Luke 10:22-37, Jesus responded to a lawyer's question (a "lawyer" was an expert in the law of Moses) with the story of the traveler beaten by robbers and left for dead, and the three people who encountered him. Jesus ended the story by asking the man which of the three proved himself to be a neighbor and upon hearing the man's reply instructed him to go and do. For Jesus, the real issue was not "Who is my neighbor," but "Am I a neighbor." What does it mean to be a neighbor.

For one thing, it means to risk caring about people. Of the three who encountered the beaten man, the first was a priest who passed by on the other side of the road. Perhaps the man looked dead and the priest did not want to risk the ceremonial defilement of touch a dead body. But he didn't know for sure the man was dead, and made no attempt to find out one way or the other. It was too risky to care.

The second traveler, a Levite, also withheld his compassion and moved along on the other side, not even breaking stride. There was likely some pressing business that took him along this road (assisting in the temple worship?), and to stop to help would have been too risky — he might be needed! Too busy to care.

Deborah Alexander said, "I

took a chance on letting this man stay the night with my children. My heart felt safe. I just felt good about this man. He was grateful." Any sensible person would be thinking right about now, "But what about your kids, lady! How could you be so careless?" How many times has that very kind of sensible thinking kept many of us from being neighbors? Her kids were a consideration, of course, but she intuitively trusted this person. His need was genuine, and she was willing to risk. She cared. Deborah had her own problems, but she didn't let them keep her from daring to care for another beaten down traveler. Argue all you like about her discernment (pro or con), but she acted like a Jesus kind of neighbor.

I can't help but wonder how many of the people who passed Robert Cantrell on the streets in that little town were good church folks? I wonder if any of them spoke to him, or if they just looked straight ahead as they passed? I wonder if anyone else offered Cantrell any help? I wonder if I would have? Did anyone else care?

For another thing, to be a neighbor means to recognize human worth. I wonder what others in town thought when they encountered Cantrell's disheveled appearance? Bum? Loser? A waste of humanity? What's your own first thought when you see a Robert Cantrell coming down the sidewalk?

Why did Miss Alexander ask Robert Cantrell to sit on her stoop and talk? Why did she offer him a comfortable place to stay for the night and fix him a meal the next day? Having never met the lady, I can't say for sure, but I suspect it's because she recognized his worth as a human being. There is one great truth that levels the playing field for us all — whether homeless person or upstanding citizen, addict or model of responsibility, poor or upper class — and it is the truth that we are all created in the image of God our Father. That alone accounts for our fundamental significance and worth. The priest and the Levite (those who should have known better) were denying the fundamental worth of the man on the other side of the road. Deborah Alexander could not do that to Robert Cantrell, thank God. She dared not shrink back from someone who had made a mess of his life, but still needed a neighbor.

When Jesus introduced the third player in his story, he finished turning the table on his questioner (the Bible expert who was testing His soundness) and absolutely shocked anyone who might have been listening to the story. Jesus said that after the priest and Levite, a Samaritan came along! And it was the Samaritan, loathed and despised by the Jews of Jesus' day, who showed compassion! I believe Jesus' point in making a Samaritan the hero in the story was to impress upon the expert in the law the failing of the religious establishment to care about the real needs of people. Real godliness is sometimes found in the most unexpected places and people.

In the photo Deborah Alexander stands in front of the abandoned house with her youngest child slung across her hip. She has three children, no husband. Typical. Black woman with three kids, taking the best advantage of our welfare system. Wonder if she plans on having another one soon so she can collect more money? Don't lie to yourself; isn't that our stereotypical view? Yet, there she was, going out of her way to help another human in need. There were no government agencies around when Cantrell needed them the most, no church folk. But Deborah Alexander was. So much for stereotypes.

To the Bible expert in Luke's narrative the question of "Who is my neighbor" was nothing more than an intellectual exercise to test Jesus' soundness. It was important to him that Jesus give the right answer to this issue. Jesus did give the right answer. His answer was that more important than trying to draw our circle of compassion as small and tight as possible is the issue of actually being a neighbor. Jesus didn't say to the man "Go and think likewise." What He did say was "Go and do likewise."

Miss Alexander said of Robert Cantrell, "He should've died with people that cared about him." If there is anything good to be found in Cantrell's death, it's that he died knowing that at least one person had cared about him. I'm grateful to Deborah Alexander for reminding me of what it means to be a neighbor.

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# DDBAWDM

**Ron Newberry**

Twenty plus years ago I heard someone make a pithy statement that I have repeated countless times. In fact, I used to say it so much that a former member who moved away years ago cross stitched and framed it for me in 1983. It hangs in my office to this day. It always makes English teachers cringe and grammarians shiver. However, it makes an excellent point which we would do well to keep in mind. Dogs don't bark at what don't move.

That's one of life's great lessons that I still need to be reminded of occasionally. Do you feel at times that there's a critic sniping from every tall building and tossing grenades from behind every bush? No matter what you do, someone wants to tell you what you did wrong. Not that they have a better way, mind you. They just want to share with you how you should have done it another way.

There's the story of an old man, a boy and a donkey were going to town many years ago. The boy rode on the donkey and the old man walked. As they went along they passed some people who remarked it was a shame the old man was walking and the boy was riding. The man and boy thought that the critics were right, so they changed positions.

Later, they passed some people who remarked, "What a shame. He makes the little boy walk while he gets the luxury of riding!" Since whichever one rode, the other was criticized, they decided they would both walk.

Before long, they passed a group of people who thought they were stupid to walk when they had a decent donkey to ride! That surely didn't make sense, so they both rode the donkey.

Hardly ten minutes had passed when they passed some people who shamed them by saying how cruel it was to put such a load on a poor donkey! The boy and the man discussed the situation and agreed the critics were probably right, so they decided to carry the donkey. They soon came to a bridge and as they crossed the bridge they lost their grip on the animal and he fell into the river and drowned!

The moral of the story?

(continued on next page)

> "Someone is going to criticize you no matter what you do, so do what you believe to be best in keeping with God's will."

# How to Avoid Doing Wrong When You Are Right

**Paul Jarrett**

"Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, saying, 'The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.'" (Matthew 23:1-3).

The scribes and Pharisees were the religious authorities of their day. While Jesus often challenged their priorities, he still told the people to observe the things that they taught. However, Jesus warned the people not to do as they did because while the Pharisees were right, they were wrong. They did not practice what they preached. Furthermore, they delighted in binding burdens on others they were not willing to bear themselves (Matthew 23:4). They did this because they enjoyed the prestige that came with their position as religious leaders, but they failed to submit to the authority of God and render service to others (Matthew 23:5-11).

While we may not see ourselves as having anything in common with

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(DDBAWDM continued)
Someone is going to criticize you no matter what you do, so do what you believe to be best in keeping with God's will.

Dan Southerland notes in his book titled Transitioning (pp. 113-27) that there are two steps in dealing with criticism/opposition: (1) Expect it, but don't take it personally; otherwise, it will discourage you and cause you to doubt your vision; (2) Keep on track, or it will distract you and drain you of your energies. Southerland then quotes James 2:4, "Consider it all joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

Dogs don't bark at what don't move. Remember, when they do bark, it's because you're moving. The key truth to hang on to is that you should expect the barking, but stay the course and don't get sidetracked.

Speaking of tracks, I heard the same brother who gave me that wonderful little saying about dogs also say one day, "Engineers don't stop trains to throw rocks at barking dogs." Sometimes those down home, country spun sayings hold a lot of truth. Just remember from now own, "DDBAWDM."

the scribes and the Pharisees, there are times when we also are wrong even when we are right. There are times when we do not practice what we preach. There are times when we place burdens on others, rather than seeking to bear their burdens. We may even be guilty at times of taking delight in exercising authority rather than humbling ourselves before God and Christ through service rendered to others. When this happens we are doing wrong, even though we may be right in what we are saying.

If we are inclined to pass judgment on others who do things we would not do, or if we are inclined to hold in contempt those who feel they cannot accept what we feel free to do, we are behaving more like weak brethren than the strong Christians God has called us to be. This lesson is designed to challenge us to examine ourselves, and seek to do right, not just be right. The church will always have weak members, but the church needs the kind of strong brothers and sisters Paul called on us to be in the 14th chapter of Romans. Here are some suggestions for helping us to become this kind of strong Christian.

*First, we need to keep in mind at all times that knowledge is not the supreme virtue - love is.* The apostle Paul said it like this: “If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing” (I Corinthians 13:2). While some may discount the significance of the order in which Peter lists the Christian virtues, I find it interesting that “moral excellence” precedes “knowledge” and “love” is the crowning virtue (see II Peter 1:5-7). Knowledge is of value only when it is rooted in personal morality and displayed in a love for others. The fact that this should be our aim is seen in these words: “If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him” (and) “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (I Corinthians 8:2,3 & John 13:35).

*Second, we must not forget that knowledge alone leads to pride.* It is only when knowledge is combined with love that we can truly use what we know to edify others. The apostle Paul put it like this: “Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies” (I Corinthians 8:1ff). In Romans 2:17-24 Paul described how the Jews boasted in their knowledge of the Law, but their failure to practice what they preached led to God’s name being blasphemed among the Gentiles. Our knowledge will never gain a hearing for God until it is displayed in our lives. One of the key differences between Jesus and the Pharisees is seen when you compare Matthew 23:4 with Galatians 6:2. The Pharisees were adept at laying burdens on others, but the Law of Christ is fulfilled when we "bear one another's burdens." It is certainly the case that, "no one will care how much you know until they know how much you care."

*Third, we need to realize that while all of us know something, no one of us knows it all.* The apostle Paul made this point in addressing conditions in the church at Corinth. Paul wrote of how "we all have knowledge," but he also noted that some at Corinth did not even know that "there is but one God" (I Corinthians 8:1,6,7). However, he did not tell those who knew there was only one God to deplore the ignorance of those who still believed that there were idol gods in the world. To the contrary, Paul urged them to be careful not to abuse the conscience of those who did not know what they knew (I Corinthians 8:8-13). Paul uses this same approach in Romans 14 where he tells those who are at different levels of knowledge not to pass judgment on one another, or to hold one another in contempt. We should practice our faith to the best of our knowledge, but we must avoid acting like we know it all.

*Fourth, we must not forget the source of our knowledge and we must be willing to give others the chance to learn.* The apostle Paul pricked the heart of the arrogant Corinthians by asking, "Who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it" (I Corinthians 4:7). Before we yield to the temptation to look down on someone who may not seem to know as much as we do, we need to say to ourselves, "there, but for the grace of God, go I." What we know is a product of the efforts of others, be it our parents, teachers, or the men who penned the words of the Bible. While we may have exerted some effort in learning what we know, we were privileged to have the opportunity to learn. We need to offer this same opportunity to others. I fear at times we are like harsh parents or teachers who only criticize the children in their care for not being as proficient as they are in the performance of their assigned tasks. These words of Paul to those who wish to teach others need to be taken to heart: "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in

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opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth" (II Timothy 2:24-25).

*Fifth, we must bear in mind that all of us fall short of practicing the things we know.* No less a Christian than the apostle Paul put it like this, "For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want" (Romans 7:19). How often are we guilty of the sin we condemn in others? Our sin may not take the same form as the one we are critiquing, but in the eyes of God we are all sinners. Those who are truly spiritual are aware of their own weaknesses. This enables them to minister to others in the manner Paul prescribed when he wrote: "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). Jesus knew that the outspoken Peter could never minister to others the way he ought until he had been humbled by an awareness of his own weakness. Therefore, Jesus told him, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-32). Our ability to minister to others is not based on how much we know and our sense of personal accomplishment. If Peter had not denied Christ, he would never have been able to minister to those who are weak. He would have continued to place his confidence in his own performance. This is why Jesus did not pray that Peter would not fail. Rather, he prayed that Peter's faith would not fail. Jesus knew that it was only through coming to appreciate his own reliance on faith in Christ that Peter would be able to strengthen others with that same message. When he leaned on himself he was "Simon." He was "Peter" only when he leaned on Jesus. Likewise, we cannot take the speck out of our brother's eye until we have acknowledged our dependence on God's grace to remove the log that is in our own eye (see Matthew 7:1-5).

*Finally, it must always be our aim to edify one another.* Paul's counsel in Romans 14 has proven difficult to apply, in large measure because of our tendency to make exceptions to those subjects on which we are inclined to pass judgment on others. I would like to suggest that we might avoid some of the problems with making application of the principles set forth in this text if we would focus on what it means to be a strong (i.e. mature) Christian. Our strength is not measured in what we know. It is not even measured in how well we do what we know. Rather, our strength is seen in how we relate to those who are weak. Paul put it like this: “Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification”(Romans 15:1-2). When we make this the measure of our strength then we will do as Paul instructed in Romans 14:13,19: “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this-not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way. …Pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.” As is the case in all things, Jesus is our perfect example. He came as a Light in the world to show the way to the Father. While the words he spoke will one day judge us, he did not speak them to condemn. Rather, his words were words of life to those who received them (John 12:46-48). Those of us who aspire to be strong Christians need to guard our tongue in keeping with these instructions: “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear” (Ephesians 4:29).

I have often told people that the lessons I present are those I have received from my study of God’s word. I am merely passing on to others what I have first learned myself. I believe it is important for me to try to apply any lesson in my own life first. This is especially the case with this lesson. It is very tempting to want others who hear this lesson to take it to heart, and to be the strong brother and sister I am describing. That would allow me to expect them to bear my weaknesses. It would free me to continue to pursue my own desires without having to be considerate of the needs of others.

However, if I want to be a leader in the church, I must be willing to accept the challenge of making a personal application of this lesson. What is true for me is also true for anyone who wishes to be a leader in the church. If you are (or aspire to be) a minister, an elder, a deacon, a teacher, or simply an older man or woman, this lesson is for you. No one can truly claim to be a strong Christian until they have learned how to avoid doing wrong when they are right.

One of the things that impresses me most when I think of the perfection of Christ is how He was able to accept and minister to imperfect people. Those who have great knowledge and/or skill in a given area often make poor teachers because they lack patience with those who do not have their level of capability. This is one reason why the best athletes do not always make the best coaches. Fortunately for us, the perfection of Christ extended to His ability to accept and minister to sinful men and women. This aspect of Jesus' perfection was captured in Isaiah's prophecy, which is quoted in Matthew 12:19,20 where we are told, "He will not quarrel, nor cry out; nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A battered reed He will not break off, and a smoldering wick He will not put out, until He leads justice to victory." The secret to Jesus' ministry was that He practiced what He preached. He did not just parade His knowledge before people, telling them what to do. Rather, "He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil" (Acts 10:37).

As I was preparing this lesson, I thought about how often I have been guilty of wanting people to recognize me for what I know. As I thought about this, I came to realize that when I depart this life I really do not want people standing around talking about how much knowledge I possessed. Rather, I would hope they would have cause to talk about how I used that knowledge to edify, instruct and console others. I would hope they would talk about times when I served others.

The third chapter of James is well-known for what is written there about the sins of the tongue. A study of this chapter often focuses on the first 12 verses, but I have long been of the opinion that the greatest lesson to be learned from this chapter is found in verses 13-18. In these verses we find a description of two types of wisdom. The one who is wise and understanding in the manner God commends exhibits his wisdom, "by his good behavior." This "wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy." On the other hand, the wisdom that is not from above is characterized by "jealousy and selfish ambition," and results in "disorder and every evil thing." Any of us who desire to be teachers need to be certain that we possess the wisdom that is from above. Otherwise, we "will incur a stricter judgment" (James 3:1) even when we are right if we do wrong.

Paul Jarrett preaches for the Naples Church of Christ. He can be contacted at 1450 Mandarin Rd., Naples, FL 34102.

# Tell the Story

**Robert J. Young**

My friend told me about his barber's resolve to mention God to every customer entering his shop. As he prepared to shave one fellow, he felt compelled to say something to him about his soul. He hesitated, afraid to raise the issue. After fretting for a few moments as he skillfully wielded the razor, he finally boomed out in his best bass voice, "Are you prepared to die?" As the blood drained from the customer's face, he jumped from the chair and shouted back, "Not if I can help it!"

The barber defeated himself because he was so fearful that all he communicated was fear. His timing was less than the best. He utterly failed to share the Savior effectively.

Sharing the story of Christ, inviting others to Bible study or worship, often makes us apprehensive. We are afraid to raise the issue. I doubt that we are ever completely rid of the fear, but consider these "fear stoppers."

The better you know a person, and the better that person knows and understands you, the better the reception of your invitation.

Watch for opportunities to show care and compassion, then follow that with an invitation. Jesus was compassionate to the woman at the well and the woman taken in adultery, but he also focused on the spiritual issues (You must worship God in spirit and truth; go and sin no more).

Use the "double invitation." Invite to worship and to your home or out to eat afterward. Or invite them to another occasion to extend the invitation to worship.

Listen to others. Some who do not attend believe church people do all of the talking and none of the listening.

Listen long enough to recognize a felt need and assist your friend in understanding how Christ can help meet that need. The list could be continued, but perhaps these ideas will start your own creative juices flowing. Tell your friends the story, then invite them.

"The fields are ripe unto harvest, but the reapers are few."

Robert J. Young is Senior Vice President for Administrative Services, Professor of Bible, and Director of Bible Programs at Ohio Valley College in Parkersburg, WV.

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# Divine Right and Israel's Claims

**Bobby Wade**

Does the modern state of Israel have divine right to the contested territories in the Middle East? Many professing Christians believe that she does. Sandra Smokes, columnist, is of that persuasion. She wrote, "...as a Christian, I believe Israel should and will keep certain lands..." ("The Need to Speak Out," Evansville Courier, July 30, 2002). She affirmed her faith in "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," and cited Genesis 48:3 to buttress her position. This passage says in part, "...I will make you a company of peoples and will give this land to your descendants for an everlasting possession."

It is evident from this passage and others that God's promises to Abraham and his descendants included a territory. However, it was always conditioned upon ancient Israel's faithfulness to God's covenant with them. They were warned that if they followed other gods and practiced evil, "...ye shall utterly perish from off the land, ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed," (Deuteronomy 4:25-27). Because they did not heed this and similar warnings, historical Israel was led captive by Assyria in 722 B.C., never to return. In 587 BC, Judah was taken captive to Babylon. After 70 years a remnant was allowed to return. In 70 A.D., Titus, the Roman general, quelled a rebellion in Jerusalem, completely destroying the city and the temple. With this event the Israelite nation came to an end. Thus, God has completely fulfilled the promise to give Israel a land and all of the promises to allow a remnant to return.

> "There may be good and compelling reasons why the modern state of Israel is deserving of our support."

I contend, therefore, that the modern state of Israel is not the Israel of prophecy and that she has no divinely supported claim to the land. In fact, the "divine right" argument has not been viewed as valid since the Magna Carta, or before. The leaders of modern Israel are mostly secularists. They certainly place no credence in Christian doctrine, premillennial or otherwise. However, the widespread support from evangelical Protestants in the U. S. who

(continued on next page)

# Our Hymn of Praise

**Jerry Senn**

A few weeks ago nine experienced miners realized their lives were in grave danger when suddenly, water came rushing into the shaft in which they were working. After only a few moments, they were aware that their only hope was from above and that there was absolutely nothing they could do to save themselves. All their combined years of experience and superior skills were worthless. Reality drove them to face facts: without help, the pit would be their grave. For 77 hours they waited, prayed and encouraged one another with the fading hope that help would come. And come it did. Though the nine desperate men did nothing for themselves, through the tremendous efforts of devoted workers, thousands of dollars and hundreds of man hours, the lost were retrieved — lifted finally to safety and to the waiting arms of loved ones. All they did was to step into the extended tube that had been lowered through a freshly dug chamber, and allow themselves to be lifted by a power not their own to the light and to celebration — to the unspeakable joy above.

This story is one of the most encouraging and heart warming in recent years, and it pictures the way genuine believers have been rescued from the dark, helpless pit of sin and shame by the Father's infinite grace. It was David who wrote, "I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the

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(Divine Right continued)

hold this theory is politically valuable to the Israeli government and thus, they embrace them.

There may be good and compelling reasons why the modern state of Israel is deserving of our support. They are our strongest allies in that part of the world, they are a democracy, and the two nations share many common values. All also agree that there is much suffering on both sides. Regardless of political persuasion or views of Biblical eschatology, every believer can properly bring God into the equation by petitioning Him that this seemingly intractable matter can be resolved in a manner that is just and fair to all parties. This would also be best for our own beloved homeland, the United States of America.

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slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God" (Psalm 40:1-3). A. W. Tozer once wrote, "Salvation is from our side a choice; from the divine side it is a seizing upon, an apprehending, a conquest by the Most High God. Our 'accepting' and 'willing' are reactions rather than actions. The right of determination must always remain with God."

Not one of the miners describes his deliverance as something accomplished by himself. When asked how they were saved, their focus is upon the devotion and dedication — the grace extended - that made it possible. To be sure, they chose to accept their deliverance and the freedom they now enjoy. But that should never become their central focus.

> "We must maintain the intensity of our devotion to God, not by a periodic reflection on what 'we' did to receive salvation, but by focusing daily and hourly on His amazing grace..."

To me, it is sad when those of us who have been delivered from the depths of sin choose to focus more on what we did to receive God's grace rather then giving the primary recognition to the One who rescued us. This unfortunate attitude is often observed when we speak of our salvation only (or primarily) in terms of what we did at baptism, rather than to point to what Christ did for us in making salvation possible. I seldom hear brethren speak of the occasion when Christ "saved me." We seem to speak more often of "our baptism."

Is baptism necessary to salvation? Most assuredly so (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:26-27; Romans 6:3-4)! But, let us never forget the fact that, "Having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God..." (Colossians 2:12), "He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). As Paul found it necessary to remind the pride-filled believers at Corinth, "It is because of him that you are in Christ

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# Spanking

**Russ Jurek**

I don't always read the "Annie's Mailbox" (formerly, "Ann Landers") column in the paper, but a recent article caught my attention, "Grandfather Should Honor Parents' spanking policy." A woman wrote, "Dear Annie: My husband and I have a 3-year-old daughter, 'Emily.' We have decided not to spank her because I believe spanking is child abuse. My husband disagrees, but he respects my wishes and we discipline Emily with time-outs and other appropriate measures. Our relatives are aware of our decision." She goes on to describe an incident where her father-in-law spanked Emily while at his house. The woman confronted her fathering-law and his response was, "In my house, she will abide by my rules and my punishment." At that the woman says she informed her father-in-law that from that point on if he wanted to see Emily, he would have to do so at her house where Emily is subject to her and her husband's rules and punishment. The woman then says her father-in-law has not visited since. Her husband believes his father was "within his rights" in his discipline of Emily and because his father's birthday is approaching, wants Emily to go to a birthday event at his father's house. The woman concludes her letter thus: "I have yet to hear an apology from my father-in-law. I feel like I am protecting my daughter. Who is right?"

It is not my intention in this article to discuss the grandfather's

(continued on next page)

(Our Hymn continued)

Jesus, who has become…our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore…let him who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:30-31). With Paul, we may say, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14).

We must maintain the intensity of our devotion to God, not by a periodic reflection on what "we" did to receive salvation, but by focusing daily and hourly on His amazing grace, who reached down to save us from the terrible pit of sin. Let us, with David, "sing a new song…a hymn of praise to our God."

Jerry Senn serves the Hendersonville church as elder and preacher. He can be contacted at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28791.

(Spanking continued)
action; perhaps another article will be dedicated to the role of grandparents in the discipline of grandchildren. I chose this topic because of the issue of "spanking." Since Families Matter Ministries is dedicated to getting families into God's Word to see His plan for family relationships, allow me to point out God's view on this subject. Then please consider this woman's view in light of the scriptures and perhaps it will help you conduct a parenting self-checkup.

Consider these statements, "we have decided…because I believe spanking is child abuse." "My husband disagrees, but he respects my wishes." "We discipline with time-outs and other appropriate measures." "I feel like I am protecting my daughter."

What is wrong with this picture? First, it seems there is disagreement between the husband and wife as to discipline principles and the husband is submitting to the wife. "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body of which he is the savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything" (Ephesians 5:22-24). Yes, the Scriptures teach the principle of mutual submission (Ephesians 5:21), but I doubt that Paul meant for the wife to take the lead in determining discipline issues.

Second is the question of "appropriate measures" concerning discipline. Apparently, this woman has decided God's measures are inappropriate. She believes "spanking is child abuse." But God says, "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him" (Proverb 13:24). "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death" (Proverb 23:13-14). So, is she really protecting her daughter or is she jeopardizing her soul? Somewhere along the line, we have bought the psychological mumbo gumbo that if you spank a child you are teaching him to use violence and you will hurt his self-esteem. Consequently, we have a society of ill-mannered, disrespectful and undisciplined children. I agree wholeheartedly that physical and emotional abuse harm children and are never acceptable. However, to categorize all corporal punishment as child abuse is foolish at best and arrogant at worst. If God, who is the creator, says corporal punishment is "appropriate" who are we to say it is abuse? Do things God's way and they will work!

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Now available from HillCrest Publishing, Philippians: United in Christ, by Carolina Christian writer Stephen J. Walls Mathis. United in Christ, part of the HillCrest Streams of Mercy series, is an eight part study guide of Philippians designed for use in bible classes or small groups.

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# Coming to Terms With Good Enough

**Stephen J. Walls-Mathis**

Earl, World War II bomber pilot and retired electrical engineer, shook my hand firmly on his way out. With a half-grin, he said, “Well, Stephen, you certainly had some material up there today.”

It was hardly a compliment. Earl and I both knew my sermon on the Holy Spirit had left the pulpit only to hit the ground like a wingless dove. All feathers, no flight.

Earl's comment stands out as the most vivid post-sermon critique I have ever received. Few things in my faith life have carried the weight of the spoken Word. As the son of a preacher, and later as a homiletics student, the importance of the sermon, as much a work of art as proclamation, shaped my ministry. My goal was to prepare and deliver only the best Sunday after Sunday. As a preacher, I faced Sunday mornings when the best I could bring to the pulpit was barely “good enough.”

I was plagued by questions. How do you respond to criticism that hits the mark, or to compliments that miss the point? What do you deliver to the congregation on Sunday morning when you're just not satisfied with your efforts? I prided myself on preparing and delivering effective, insightful and faithful sermons. What happens when they don't measure up?

We face these questions throughout our lives, trapped between two internal extremes. First, we are often our own worst critics. All we see or do is colored by a pessimistic assumption of failure. On the other hand, we often take too much pride in our efforts, believing that we have what it takes to out perform everyone else, even God. This is, of course, unrealistic and leads to a frustrated faith when we find that we can barely do what is good enough.

Singer and songwriter Chris Rice captures our ongoing battle with our own limits in his song, “Clumsy”: “Think I’d have it down by now/Been practicing for thirty years./ Should have walked a thousand miles/So what am I still doing here?/ Reaching out for that same ole piece of forbidden fruit/ Slip and fall and knock my halo loose/ Somebody tell me what’s a boy supposed to do?/ I get so clumsy, I get so foolish/ I get so stupid, then I feel so useless.”

You can relate to that experience, can't you? We try so hard, but our efforts never seem to measure up, never seem to be good enough. This came home for me when, during my time as a minister, I went through a period of successive weeks plagued by headaches and a lack of sleep. My sermon preparation and delivery suffered along with my head.

One Sunday in particular, in the height of allergy season, I dreaded the closing prayer. My practice had been to wait at the back of the auditorium to shake hands and talk to people as they left. My sermon that day had been so muddled and confused, all I wanted to do was take my paisley tie home and hide.

Jane approached with her best elementary school teacher smile. Having taught special education for 20 years, Jane had been through her share of rough moments. “I know you struggled today," she said, “but I appreciate you giving us the best you could give. When you keep your students’ needs clear in your mind and heart, then sometimes, Stephen, good enough really is good enough.”

That same Sunday Alice, a woman in her late seventies, told me she had been particularly-touched by something I said. She told me, “My sister, Rose, is losing her hearing, and it's been really difficult for her to deal with. What you said about how God comforts us with His presence reminded me that He really is in control. I can't wait to call Rose and tell her what you said.” I only wish I could remember! When I reviewed my sermon manuscript, there was nothing there about God’s “comforting presence.” God spoke through my sermon without the help of my carefully chosen words. There’s a lesson we all need to learn. We are working for God before anyone else, which gives us direction in our lives and comfort in face of our failures. We don’t have to get everything right; God is in the business of “right-making” in us and through us. He is at work in us; we are His handiwork. When our lives have been redeemed and transformed by the power of Jesus Christ, then “good enough” is good enough.

Chris Rice’s song continues: “From where I stand Your holiness is up so high I could never reach it/ My only hope is to fall on Jesus.” Which is exactly right! We offer our very best to God, we offer everything to Him, and when it still doesn't measure up, He makes up the difference.

“So, Earl,” I asked, as he headed out the door, “any suggestions for improvement?” The wise old man smiled, placed his brown fedora on his bald head, and said, “Next time you preach on the Holy Spirit, just make sure He shows up.”

Thanks Earl. I'll do that.

# South Carolinians in Missions

**Mark Hudson**

Eleven members of churches of Christ from South Carolina participated in campaigns in South America for the first two weeks of August. Efforts focused on several villages along the Corentyne River which borders Guyana and Suriname. A School of Evangelism has been started in Crabwood Creek, Guyana. Campaigners also worked in Orealla, Guyana and Apoera, Suriname. Twenty were baptized during this trip.

The 2002 Mission team was a diverse group of Christians. This year's trip was organized by Billy McVey, minister for the Kingstree church of Christ. Billy has extensive experience in Guyana and will continue to coordinate mission efforts from South Carolina.

Jody Evans is a recent graduate of the Central Carolina School of Preaching. He is a member of the church in Georgetown, SC, and had made many trips to Guyana. Jody remained in Crabwood Creek with plans to stay for six months to start the School of Evangelism.

Carnell Fee is a barber living in Columbia, SC. He was baptized about a year ago and worships with the Winnsboro church of Christ.

Curtis Gilbert is retired Army and currently preaches for the church in Union. Although Curtis has done missions in Poland, this was his first experience in Guyana.

Max Goodman is from North Augusta, South Carolina, and worships in Aiken. He teaches computer assisted drafting at Evans High School in Evans, Georgia. Max's technical skills proved very helping in fixing church generators in the bush.

Craig Hinrichs made his second trip to Guyana and Suriname. Craig preaches for the church of Christ in Winnsboro.

Mark Hudson, minister for the Aiken church of Christ, was in Guyana for the third time. Barbara “Dot” Johnson took two weeks away from her family in Great Falls to make her first trip to South America. She is a scan data operator and worships with the Great Falls church of Christ. Gregory Johnson is a member of the Kingstree church of Christ. He and his family live in Greeleyville, and Greg is employed as an Alcohol & Drug Abuse Counselor at the Turbyville Correctional Institution. This was Greg's second trip to Guyana.

Freddie McCray returned to Guyana for his 9th trip. Freddie lives and worships in Andrews. He is a graduate of the Central Carolina School of Preaching and works as a salesman and carpet

# A Barnabas Club?

**Jerry Senn**

In 1849, when Nathaniel Hawthorne was dismissed from his government job in the customs house, he went home in despair. His wife listened to his tale of woe, set pen and ink on the table in front of him, lit the fire, put her arms around his shoulders and said, “Now you will be able to write your novel.” Hawthorne did, and the world of literature was enriched with The Scarlet Letter. Turning stumbling blocks into stepping stones demands an encourager.

To encourage means, “to instill with courage or hope...to stimulate.” Encouragement is a universal human need. The reason for this is that not much gets done unless we are positively stimulated or motivated. It isn’t unusual for us to start out with a head of steam, but staying on top of our game isn’t easy. We quickly learn how frail we really are and tend to retreat from the battle when obstacles pop up. Discouragement is Satan’s greatest weapon.

We all know Barnabas. His name tells the story, “Son of Encouragement.” He didn’t choose the name; it was given to him because he instilled courage in others. He had a sixth sense to detect when someone needed a boost, a companion, or a friend. Without Barnabas the world may never have known its greatest missionary, the apostle Paul. Without Barnabas, his cousin, John Mark, a drop-out, might not have recovered to become a consistent and valued disciple. Without this “son of encouragement”,

(continued on next page)

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installer.

Grady Mickle preaches for churches of Christ in Chester and Great Falls. He has been preaching for 25 years, but this was his first experience in Guyana. When asked how to describe South American Missions, Grady said, “You don't know until you go.”

Follow-up is proving to be an important part of this mission effort. More trips are being planned by individuals and groups. A team of workers from Tennessee will be in Apoera in October to help complete the new building.

If you would like information about the opportunity to serve, please contact Billy McVey at 843-354-5362.

(Barnabas Club continued)
the church in Antioch might never have maintained the wonderful unity and growth it achieved to God's glory.

The church gathers often for instruction and admonition. And, who can deny the need to be taught truth consistently and charged with the responsibility of sharing our faith and living for Christ. What we seem to forget is, we need encouragers who will help us do it. It takes considerable skill and hard work to teach, preach and proclaim a message, but without an equal amount of encouragement to apply the truth and grow in active faith, most of what we know is never applied in real life. We need some folks, like Barnabas, who not only tell us what we ought to do, but who take us by the hand and encourage us to do it.

Wouldn't it be great to get together regularly with a bunch of fellow believers whose purpose is to encourage and to be encouraged? They would do more than merely pat each other on the back and smile. They would do more than share the word. This group would share their weaknesses and vulnerabilities, admit needs and ask for help. They would pray together, be committed to one another, accountable and available. When I'm having a rough week, or a bad day, just to know there's a Barnabas who cares and will provide encouragement, would make a great difference in my performance and success in honoring Christ. Does anyone else feel this need? If so, why don't we charter a Barnabas Club?

Paul must have had Barnabas in mind when he wrote, "If a man's gift...is encouragement, let him encourage," (Romans 12:8). Some are especially gifted in this important work. But the Hebrew writer said, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together... but let us encourage one another," (Hebrews 10:24-25). I get the idea that an important part of our meetings ought to involve encouragement of one another, don't you? Maybe we just need to see our assemblies for what God intended them to be: a time to be uplifted and empowered by one another. And we need something between assemblies, don't we? The same writer said, "Encourage one another daily," (Hebrews 3:13). I believe we all need to be part of a Barnabas Club. Or, could we all commit ourselves to be a Barnabas to someone everyday!

# Servant Search

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# Urgent Need!

# The Constant Gardener

**Kent Massey**

I am not a gardener. Do not let me near your plants or any green vegetation that grows in your home. I come with a warning label from the American Garden Institute, “This man is hazardous to your plants.” I have the proverbial “black thumb” and weeds won’t even grow for me. I love plants and flowers, but gardening is not my gift.

So you can imagine my trepidation when my wife, Vallarie, approached me earlier this summer about planting flowers. I really didn’t want to do it because I had convinced myself it would be another horticultural horror. But we went out, bought some seeds and decided to try one more time.

Planting is an exercise in faith. When you open up the seed packet it’s hard to believe that the beautiful, fragrant flowers on the outside cover are contained in the tiny dry seeds that you hold in your hand. The seeds for the Cosmos were nice substantial seeds that looked like they could actually produce something. Sweet peas were like trying to sow dust mites. Moss roses were small little microscopic seeds that if you sneezed would blow away into the air. They didn’t look like much to work with.

The soil was prepared, the seeds were planted, the sun was warm and the water frequent. Time, along with a couple of scoops of Miracle Grow, produced a lovely assortment of flowers that will bloom all summer long. Every day when I go home and see those flowers I am amazed that those sickly looking seeds could bring forth such beauty.

My experience has given me a greater appreciation for gardeners. Gardeners put their hope in insignificant looking seeds. They invest sweat equity in nurturing, loving and cultivating tiny specs of dust. They put up with weeds, rusts, smuts and weather that is most always too dry, too hot or too something. The gardener can’t make seeds, can’t control the weather, can’t determine which seeds are good and which are bad. Yet, gardeners can assist in the creation process and help midwife beauty while nurturing and feeding the beauty that lies within each seed waiting to burst into bloom.

Gardening is all about life. That is why Jesus’ parable in Matthew 13 strikes a chord. In the story (Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23) Jesus tells about the realities that we face as we sow the seed. We are responsible for sowing, but whether the seed germinates, takes root, grows and produces fruit is dependent upon the quality of the ground it falls upon.

Jesus speaks of three different kinds of soil. The first is the hardened path. The rich word, filled with the power of a new life, never even penetrates the soil. It lies on the path and is eaten by birds. The beaten path is not a fertile path. It is worn down and the soil is packed hard by the steps of countless feet.

The second soil is not much better. While the rocky and thorn infested soil allows the seed to take hold, it doesn't offer enough depth for the struggling plant to do much more than sprout and then shrivel up. The whole purpose of gardening isn't just to get seeds to sprout. The sole purpose is to end up with a harvest. The fruits — the veggies, the bountiful blooms — are the reason gardeners garden in the first place.

The last soil is the best. Those seeds find their way into deep, fertile soil. Those seeds take root and the stalks grow tall toward the sun. They yield a harvest beyond the original amount of seed first sown.

Though each soil showed differing results, the process for all three began the same way — the seed had to be sown. Sometimes getting seed in the ground is the hardest part of farming.

There once was an old gardener who showed his out of town friend the packets of seeds he was planning to plant. The packets promised beautiful, huge tasty vegetables of every kind. "This is going to be my best garden ever." Late that summer the same out of town friend showed up for a visit. "How's your garden doing?" he asked. "Not too good," the gardener replied. "That's too bad," sympathized the visitor. "What's the problem? Too dry? Bad dirt? Bugs?" The gardener shook his head. "Then maybe the seed was the problem," the visitor suggested. "Yah, I guess the seed was the problem," the gardener admitted. "You see, I never got around to planting any of it."

It starts with planting the seed. Yet, gardeners also understand that there's something else that has to occur before the harvest can come — persistent patience.

Doug Murren retells the old native American story of an opossum watching a seed grow and the lessons we can learn from it:

"One day an opossum visited his good friend, a raccoon, at his home near the river. The opossum marveled at his friend's lush garden and asked if he could grow one like it. The raccoon assured the opossum he could do so, although he cautioned him, 'It's hard work.'

The opossum eagerly vowed to do the hard work necessary, then asked for and received some seeds. He rushed home with his treasure, buried them amid much laughter and song, went inside to clean up, ate, and went to bed. The next morning he leapt from bed to see his new garden.

Nothing. The ground looked no different than it had the day before!

Furious with anger and frustration, the opossum shouted at his buried seeds, 'Grow, seeds, grow!' He pounded the ground and stomped his feet, but nothing happened. Soon a large crowd of forest animals gathered to see who was making all the commotion and why. The raccoon came to investigate with all the others. 'What are you doing, opossum?' he asked. 'Your racket has awakened the whole forest.'

The opossum railed about having no garden, then turned to each seed and commanded it to grow. When the animals began to mock the opossum for his silly actions, he only screamed louder. At last the raccoon spoke up once more.

'Wait a minute, Possum,' he said, 'You can't make the seeds grow. You can only make sure they get sun and water, then watch them do their work. The life is in the seed, not in you.'

As the truth sank in, the opossum ceased his yelling and began to care for the seeds as the raccoon instructed, watering them regularly and getting rid of any weeds that invaded his garden.

Then one glorious morning the opossum wandered outside to see that multitudes of beautiful green sprouts dotted his garden. Just a few days later, gorgeous flowers began to bloom. With uncontrollable excitement and pride, the opossum ran to his friend, the raccoon, and asked him to witness the miracle. The raccoon took one long look at the thriving seed and said, 'You see, Possum, all you had to do was let the seeds do the work while you watched.'

'Yes,' smiled the opossum, finally remembering the wise words of his friend many days before, 'but it's a hard job watching a seed work.'"

Murren applies the story by reminding us: "There's a lesson there for all of us. Sometimes, as Christians and church leaders, we work too hard and take ourselves too seriously instead of simply planting people in the proper environment and letting them grow," (Doug Murren, Churches That Heal: Becoming a Church That Mends Broken Hearts and Restores Shattered Lives, Howard Publishing, West Monroe, LA, 1999).

The beauty of sowing is often in its mystery. We can never know when or if life will spring up, and whether or how it will grow up. Like the old saying, "We know the number of seeds in an apple, but only God knows the number of apples in a seed." Each life touched by the good news of Jesus will respond in its own unique way. The seed will fall on some hearts and turn into harvest, others will be less bountiful and some will be barren.

The ultimate amount harvested is out of the hands of the sower. Our task is to sow. God's task is to reap. In the conclusion of the parable, even among the fertile and good dirt, the yields varied from place to place — some a hundred times, some sixty and some thirty (verse 8). We cannot compare the harvests of our results — church size, numbers of baptisms, budget surplus — with others and claim for ourselves more or less success. It is always God who brings forth the harvest and it is always God who gets the glory.

I'm looking forward to fall to plant some more seeds. It's an exciting mystery seeing the cycle of life unfold. But rather than waiting for fall to plant seeds, let's plant the seeds every day that will lead to an eternal harvest. We're to go out and sow seeds. We aren't to stand around and watch which ones grow and which ones don't. God is responsible for the harvest. Only God's touch brings life from the seed, flowers to the vine. Our job is to keep planting, keep sowing. Our job is to keep believing the green hope of life, the life that lies within each seed we scatter, each time we proclaim the news of Christ's love and grace for us.

Keep sowing!

Kent Massey can be contacted at 4900 Providence Rd., Charlotte, NC 28226.

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# Brotherhood News

**Mark Hudson**

Shallotte, NC...Jerry Bell, preacher for the Shallotte church since his graduation from Heritage Christian University in 1988, has returned to HCU. Jerry will be working as the Director of Alumni Services. He began his new position with the university at the beginning of the 2002 fall semester.

Columbia, SC...The campus ministry at USC has entered its second year. Working with the Palmetto church of Christ, Randy Gore has been serving as Campus Minister. The Palmetto congregation is seeking to raise $20,000 to help pay salary expenses during 2003. USC has 25,000 students. The Division of Student Affairs reports over 100 students at Carolina listed Church of Christ as their religious preference on admission applications. The purpose of the Carolina Campus Ministry is twofold. First is to help members of the church attending college to develop spiritually. Second, the ministry wants to reach out and evangelize students who do not yet know Jesus. For information please contact the Palmetto Church of Christ at 7000 Nursery Road, Columbia, SC 29212, 803-781-0909. Randy Gore is the campus minister (gamecock4Jesus@juno.com) and Heyward Holton is one of the elders who deals with missions.

Aiken, SC...Will Shipman is now serving on staff with the Aiken Church of Christ as a part-time associate minister. Will is also pursing a degree in mathematics and plans to teach public school upon graduation. Will and his wife, Jenni, moved to Aiken from Tennessee last year. They have been very involved in the local program, and Will has served on staff at both Carolina and Palmetto Bible Camps.

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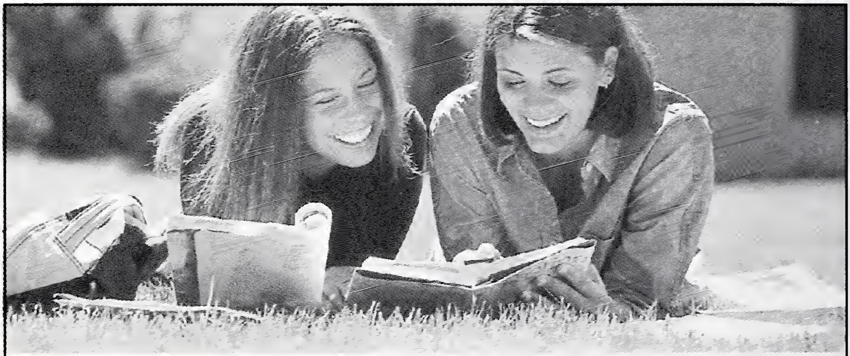

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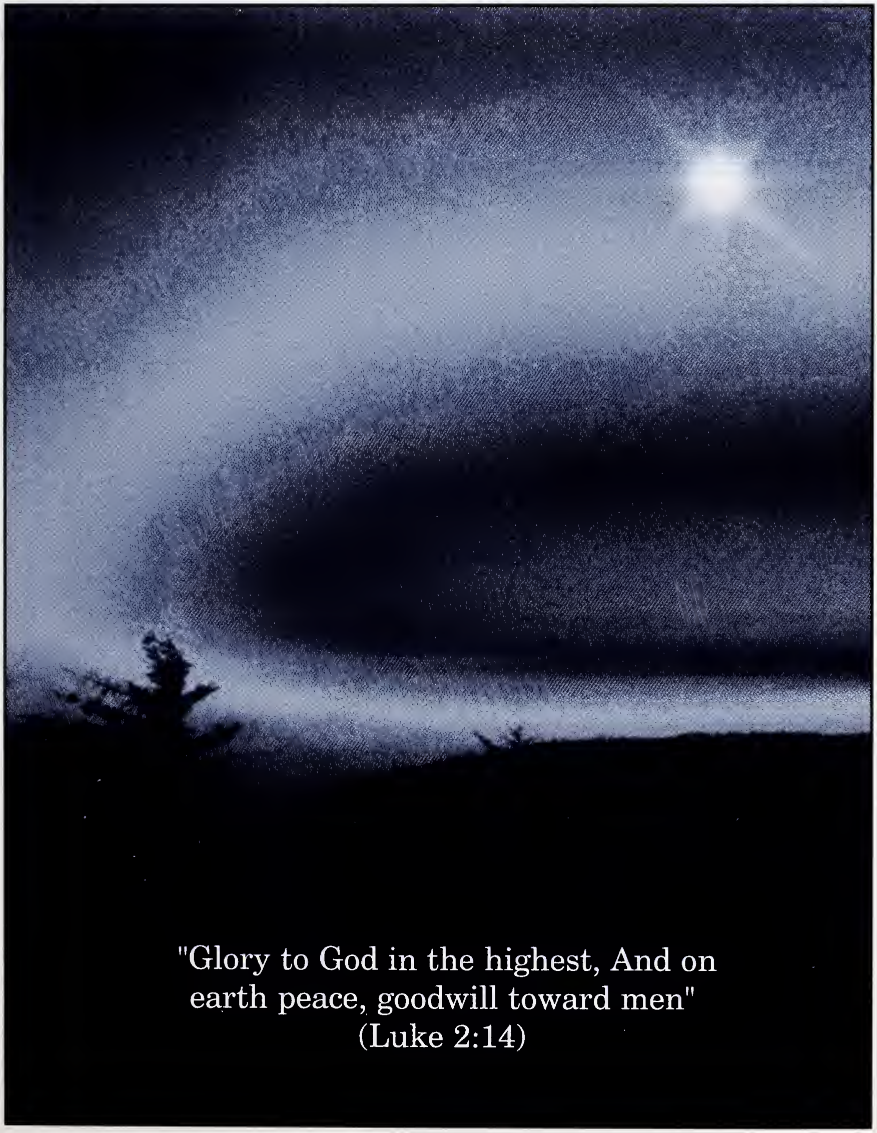

"Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men"
(Luke 2:14)

# CAROLINA christian

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# Peace

**Dennis Conner**

My favorite Christmas movie as a child was Charlie Brown's Christmas and my favorite scene is when Linus is reading the angel's announcement of the birth of the Christ child in Luke 2. As he is reading (as I remember it), the scraggly, lonely little Christmas tree Charlie Brown had earlier salvaged from the tree lot for the Christmas play — and for which he had received considerable criticism and ridicule — is transformed into a thing of beauty. And then Linus reads the passage, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." It is a warm fuzzy moment of the highest order, but then one finds himself of herself thinking, "If only it were so."

All around us, the world is in turmoil. There is September 11. Continuing war in Afghanistan. Threatened war in Iraq. Today the news reported about more suicide bombers in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. More innocent people killed. All over the globe war rages with all its attendant atrocities. Everywhere we look, the evidence seems to contradict the hopeful declaration of that brilliant night so long ago.

Well, if peace is not to be found in the world, perhaps it is to be found among God's people, the church. Oh, that it were so. Even here, in the church, the storms of turmoil swell all around us. Endless arguments and wrangles over one issue after another. Over time the issues change, but the attitudes remain the same. Congregational infighting. Suspicion. Judging. Ill will. Political maneuvering. Peace? It does exist in many corners of the kingdom, but is in seriously short supply in too many others.

> "Governments cannot provide this kind of peace. Politicians cannot negotiate it. Kings cannot decree it."

Even the birth narrative itself is filled with a disturbing scene of violence. In Matthew 2:16-18 the psychotic despot, Herod, sought to eliminate any future threat to his throne by putting to death all the male babies in Bethlehem and its environs who were two years old and younger. Toddlers and infants torn from the caring arms and nurturing breasts of their terror-stricken mothers, to be put to the sword. Indeed, as Jeremiah had said, “A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping and great mourning...” Shortly after the angel proclaimed peace, Herod declared death.

So what was the angel’s announcement all about? What are we to make of it and how are we to believe it? The key lies in understanding that the angels’ proclaimed peace lies not in a process, but a Person.

“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.” The angel came to the shepherds with a message of good news (gospel), and the content of that good news message was God’s holy visitation of our world in the person of Jesus. The good news was (and is) that a Savior has come to us, to all. To accept that Savior — to possess and be possessed by Christ — is to have peace. Through Him, we who were once alienated from the holy God because of our sin can now be at peace with the Father. As Paul wrote, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...” And then, through Christ, the barriers that separate us from one another are torn down and we are reconciled to one another (Ephesians 2:14-18). Consequently, once we are at peace with God and with one another, we can then be at peace with ourselves. Governments cannot provide this kind of peace. Politicians cannot negotiate it. Kings cannot decree it.

The peace that comes from Jesus transcends anything and everything else that the world would propose in its place. In fact, any peace that comes from mere human effort is only a short-lived sham.

Without Christ, there is no peace. There is only misunderstanding, alienation, despair, frustration, conflict, and brokenness. Peace on earth, then, means Christ in you. Come, Lord Jesus. Glory to God in the highest.

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# Tradition

**Ron Newberry**

Some years ago I read about a meeting in an old synagogue in Eastern Europe in which a prayer was being said. Half of the people in attendance stood up; the other half sat down. Those seated started shouting for those standing to sit down. Those standing shouted at those sitting to stand up.

Things were rapidly getting out of hand. Although the rabbi was a very learned man and well acquainted with the Law, he just did not know what to do about the situation that was rapidly spiraling out of control.

In exasperation he appealed to the congregation. They recommended that he consult with an elderly gentleman who was one of the original founders of their synagogue. The rabbi hoped this shut-in soon to be centenarian would be able to tell him what the actual synagogue tradition was so the situation could be resolved once and for all.

He made his way to the nursing home with a delegate of each of the factions. The representatives of the "standing" group asked the old man, "Sir, is it our tradition to stand during prayer?" The old man answered, "No my son, that is not our tradition."

The one whose followers sat, instilled with a bit of confidence at the old gentleman's first answer, asked, "Is it then our tradition to sit during prayer?" The old man replied, "No my son, that is not our tradition either."

The rabbi perplexed that neither question received support said to the old man, "My dear sir, I don't know what to do now. The members fight all the time, shouting at one another during prayer each demanding what the other group do what they themselves are convinced is right. They constantly fight over whether they should sit or they should stand."

The old man blurted out, "THAT is our tradition!"

I must admit that I have a number of traditions I enjoy. I enjoy the holiday tradition of Thanksgiving and Christmas. I look forward to the tradition that my younger daughter and I have observed for a dozen years. Each Spring we go to a first and second round of the NCAA basketball tournament somewhere in the southeast. I love the tradition that is a decade old now in which three fellow preachers and I retire to the mountains for three days to be refreshed and share our lives and ministries.

I love many of the traditions we have in the church. I appreciate our small groups that meet all over the area on Sunday evening. I love the tradition we have at Friendly Avenue of introducing new babies to the congregation and committing our assistance as a church to the parents to help them rear their child so that one day we can again introduce them following their second birth into the kingdom and to help them become a man or woman of God. I love singing many of our traditional songs such, "Our God, He Is Alive."

One tradition, however, that I despise is that of identifying human traditions, elevating them to the status of the revealed word of God and then dividing when others do not agree with us. There is certainly nothing wrong with traditions or habits or customs per se. The problem lies in how we handle them. The same was true in the days of Jesus.

In Matthew 15:3, Jesus said, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?" In verse 6b he pointed out that the Pharisees and teachers of the law that they, "Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition." In Mark 7:13, Jesus said, "Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."

Yet Jesus observed many traditions and customs. For example, "Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them" (Mark 10:1). Luke 2:42 says, "When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom." The text tells us, "He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read" (Luke 4:16). Jesus frequently went to the Mount of Olives to pray (Luke 22:39, "Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him.")

The bottom line is this: some traditions and customs are good and some are bad. Those that point us to God, help us walk closer to God, are indicative of people of God, etc., are good. Those that take our eyes off of Jesus, entice us to leave the path of righteousness and betray our claim to being people of God are to be questioned at the very least and perhaps jettisoned all together.

Let me provide an example or two. Throughout our history in churches of Christ we have a tradition of perpetuating rumors about individuals and about congregations without holding rumor mongers accountable. That tradition of just perpetuating false rumors ought to be a tradition that is stopped. It is a tradition that has gotten in the way of perpetuating the cause of Christ and it certainly has caused us to take our eyes off of God just to deal with false rumors.

It also seems to me that in the church we find only a limited number of legitimate church plantings in the same vicinity that result from a collaborative effort between those going and those staying. Our tradition is to split and then rewrite history and call it a church planting. That seems to me to be a tradition that hinders the cause of Christ both in the congregation and the community that knows of the split. Is that a good thing?

Are there any traditions we should keep? Absolutely! We ought to perpetuate a tradition of loving one another unconditionally. (John 13:34, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.") We ought to hold fast a tradition of not judging one another (Romans 14:1, "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.") We ought to dedicate ourselves to a tradition of maintaining the spirit of unity in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4: 3, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.") We ought to never listen to unsubstantiated charges against God's shepherds (1 Timothy "Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.")

Unfortunately despite the clear, unmistakable mandates just enumerated (along with dozens more) we often glibly and flippantly cast them aside for our own human traditions of despising those who don't agree with us, judging one another without so much as asking the party being judged about the situation, breaking the spirit of unity over trivial matters, maligning leaders without a second thought as to how serious that is. Need I go on?

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> "Wouldn't it be wonderful if God could look at us and see that we are as serious about unity as he is?"

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(Tradition continued)

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we were known for loving one another (which Jesus said would be the mark of his disciples)? Wouldn't it be wonderful if others (inside and outside the church) would look at our congregations and say, "Those folks sure take the Bible seriously. They can strongly disagree with one another but they never break up?" Wouldn't it be wonderful if God could look at us and see that we are as serious about unity as he is?

If we were to analyze our traditions, would we truly be proud of our history? History is not just about the past; it's about the future. One day today will be yesterday, which means today one day will be history. The way we behave today will one day be our heritage. Will someone looking back over the time we have been alive say about all the times we have fussed, feuded and fallen-out, "THAT'S our tradition?"

# Christmas

**Jim Mullican**

For most people, Christmas is a very special time of family togetherness. When children are small, it's a time of wide-eyed wonder. When they have grown up and moved far away,  it's often one of the few opportunities when we can be together for a short time each year. It's a time of giving, of looking for just the right gifts for those people who mean so much to us. It's a time of good food and gratitude for our blessings. It's a time to remember Christmases past, when times seemed less hurried and families were less scattered.

Some Christians have a problem with observing Christmas, though. Anyone who studies the Bible realizes that it never tells us precisely when Jesus was born. What little evidence there is seems to point to late September as a good possibility, but December 25 seems very unlikely since it is the height of the cold, rainy season in Judea and shepherds did not sleep out in the fields with their sheep during that time of the year. So any serious Bible student must admit that Christmas is a holiday of human, rather than divine, origin.

But is it wrong to observe such a day? Apparently not. John 10:22-23 shows Jesus in Jerusalem for the "Feast of Dedication," which is called Hanukkah today. It is a Jewish religious holiday which originated in 165 B.C. It commemorates the rededication of the temple after the Jews recaptured it from the Macedonian forces of the Syrian king, Antiochus IV, and falls on various dates in December.  Jesus appears to have observed this feast, even though it was without biblical authority. Likewise, in Romans 14, Paul discusses at great length the fact that some may observe a day while others may not, and tell s us not to be judgmental toward one another in such matters where the Bible has not given us a clear command.

So, while recognizing that Christmas is not the actual birthday of Jesus, and we don't really know when He was born, most Christians find no reason to not enjoy the spirit and joy of the Christmas holidays, but as Paul says in Romans 14:5-6, "One man considers one day  more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord." The world would be a far better place if we could keep the warmth and joy of the Christmas season in our hearts all year long!

Jim Mullican is a former Associate Editor of Carolina Christian ministers to the Channelview Church of Christ. He can be contacted at 1310 Sheldon Rd., Channelview, TX 77530.

# But Even If...

**Russ Jurek**

The scene is one of desperation. Three young men faced with a life and death decision. On one side is the pressure to do wrong, to give in to the popular thing and do as everyone else does. This would mean life. On the other side is the desire to do right regardless of the popular mood or the dire consequences. The three young men chose the side of right. For that decision they were thrown into the furnace of fire. Theirs was a desperate situation requiring determined faith.

When making their choice, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the threats of the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand O king. But even if he does not (emphasis mine), we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up," (Daniel 3:16-18). The faith of these young men was demonstrated in their conviction that the God of heaven was able to save them from the fire. But even if God chose to do otherwise, that would be his will and they would accept it. God would be there for them no matter how it worked out and they would honor him as their God regardless of the earthly consequences.

Families today are under attack similar to that faced by the three young men. The world says God is irrelevant and we should bow to the god of self-indulgence. The pressure is on for families to over spend, over extend and over indulge in worldly pleasures. Our time, energy and money are directed at activities designed to bring comfort, pleasure, convenience and enjoyment. When the relationships aren't working the way we want, we throw them away like yesterday's news. Those families that stand up for God's word and seek to be godly families are thrown into the fire of ridicule and criticism for being religious fanatics.

How is your family handling the pressure to conform to the world and its desires? The next time you are faced with a desperate situation, a failing relationship, a critical illness, or pressure to do wrong, over extend or conform, you will say, "My God is able to take care of this, but even if he doesn't, I will accept his will and continue to honor him as my God!

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# Relating to Each Other

**David Kneip**

Breaking news: some of the kids in my youth group have just hit that wonderful time, right around middle school, in which all of a sudden you realize that some of your good friends from elementary school are members of the opposite sex! You just don't know how to relate to them anymore! They're changing, they act differently, they look … nice, but you might not want to admit that. So we were talking about how you act around somebody of the other gender. What do you do on a date? How do you be a good boy/girl-friend?

I want to remind you of a good old Sunday school story that I think can help us out here. Take a look at the first two chapters of Genesis, the stories of the creation of the world. Genesis 1:26 says that God made people in his own image. There is something in us, something essential about who we are, that looks like God. We are like him in some of our ways. Further, verse 27 says that God created us "male and female." We are made together as men and women. Finally, verses 28-30 tell us what God has in mind for us to do, namely, to take care of the creation. We are here as God's representatives to care for what he has made.

Let's move on to the second chapter, the more familiar story. God makes Adam first, but there's no helper for him. God looks through all of the animals, and none of them are right. And so, God makes another creature to be Adam's helper — a human, as Adam says, "bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh." This is the story that the ancient Hebrews apparently used to explain to each other why people get married, for 2:24 says that this creative act on God's part is why men leave their parents to be married to women.

So what do these stories have to say to us about our relationships with people of the opposite sex? First, there is an intimate connection between men and women. In God's eyes, we aren't like a middle school dance — boys on one side of the room, girls on the other, and never the two shall meet! God's intention is that men and women will work together in doing his work in the world, whether that's in marriages, in school, or in church. We have a lot to offer to one another, not just for our own sakes but for the world's!

These stories also say that we're connected intimately to God. The business of relating to each other isn't just about figuring out how to talk to girls or boys and being done with it. You can't just read about good communication

(continued on next page)

# Birth Announcements

**Johnny Melton**

Luke intended to write "an orderly account" of the things Theophilus had been taught in order that he might know them with "certainty."The first example of the orderliness with which Luke wrote can be observed in the carefully balanced presentation of the birth announcements in Luke 1:5-55. In his narrative, Luke contrasted the old with the new, age with youth, unbelief with faith, and he wrapped it all in joy, tinged with scandal.

Zechariah and Elizabeth represented the best the Old Testament had to offer. They were both "upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly." But, they were old and childless. To be barren was considered a reproach before God. They represented to

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(Relating continued)

and think that you've solved the problem. Why? God is involved in the process of our relationship, and we're made in his image. You are just as much in God's image as I am. If I'm a guy, I can't just objectify you girls — focusing on your bodies or thinking about how cool everyone would think I am if you went on a date with me. And you girls can't objectify us guys, either; using us just to do fun stuff, or to make you feel better about yourselves, plain won't fly! Our God is a god of sacrificial love who didn't come to earth to be served but to serve others, and if we're made in his image, that's how we'll seek to act toward others, no matter what the world or our friends tell us.

Finally, I think that God's intention for us as men and women is to work together as teams. Genesis 1 depicts us as being created together, and chapter 2 describes the woman as Adam's "helper" (that is, not "servant" or "ruler"); these suggest to me that we are to work in partnership with each other for the sake of the kingdom. No one is the dominating leader; no one should be so passive that they allow themselves to be walked all over. We are teammates, made in God's image, who respect and honor each other.

Respect, honor, service. Not exactly the ways MTV suggests that we treat people of the opposite sex, right? But I think those are some of the things that God values on this matter. Let's all pray for each other as we strive to live in these ways.

Luke's audience the barrenness of the Old Testament system.

The birth announcement came to Zechariah as he experienced the highlight of his career as a priest. Many priests would serve their appointed week in Jerusalem all their adult lives and never have the opportunity to enter the temple to burn incense. This was Zechariah's once-in-a-lifetime chance.

Being inside the holy place was awesome enough, but as he was burning the incense, there appeared an angel, standing to the right side of the altar of incense. Zechariah was both startled and afraid. But the angel began to speak, reassuring Zechariah: "Don't be afraid. Your prayer has been heard." Perhaps Zechariah wondered what prayer? Which one? The angel continued, "Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to name him John. He will be a joy and a delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth."

I don't know if Zechariah really heard everything else the angel told him regarding the baby's career and destiny, because his response challenged the angel's fundamental statement: "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is old, too?" I'm impressed with the way Luke was careful to preserve the contrast between Zechariah and the angel. Zechariah says, "I am an old man." The angel says, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God!" Talk about one-upmanship! Zechariah had prayed for a son, and when he was young he might have believed that God would answer that prayer. But now that he was old, if he still continued to mouth the words of a prayer for a child, he no longer did so in faith. The angel punished his doubt by striking him mute until the child was born, saying, "You did not believe my words" (v. 20).

We may learn from Zechariah that growing old doesn't mean growing useless. While age is more than just a state of mind, your attitude about your age makes a lot of difference in your productivity. Learn, too, that God's delays do not necessarily mean that God is saying "no" to your prayers. God had a plan for Zechariah and Elizabeth and their child, but the time had to be right. Don't lose heart. Pray without ceasing.

Notice that after Zechariah returned home and Elizabeth became pregnant, the text says that for "five months she remained in seclusion (v. 24). Do you think that there could have been some scandal surrounding these old people? Was there speculation concerning what

Zechariah had done while in the temple that made him lose his voice? How did Elizabeth become pregnant? As far as Elizabeth was concerned, in her heart she believed that God was showing his favor on her and that He was taking away her disgrace. But did all of her friends and acquaintances think the same way?

Luke balanced the birth announcement to Zechariah with the birth announcement to Mary. The announcement came when Elizabeth was in her sixth month. God sent Gabriel to Mary's home in Nazareth, a small town in Galilee. Gabriel anticipated his announcement by the way he greeted Mary, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Luke did not attempt to tell us anything about Mary that would justify God's choosing her to give birth to Jesus. There was nothing in being from Nazareth and engaged to a carpenter named Joseph that said Mary deserved to be chosen to be the mother of the Lord. Just as God chose Zechariah and Elizabeth for His own reasons, He chose Mary to be the mother of Jesus. It was His sovereign choice by grace.

Like Zechariah, Mary responded to Gabriel's announcement with a question. However, there is a fundamental difference in the character of the two questions. Zechariah asked "How?" doubting the truthfulness of the announcement. Mary asked "How?" wanting to know the process by which the announcement would be carried out. One was a question of unbelief and was met with rebuke; the other was a question of faith and was met with an explanation. The Holy Spirit would "overshadow" Mary with the power of the Most High and she would conceive. This process was necessary "so that the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."

The angel concluded his explanation by showing that what he had described was not beyond the realm of possibility by revealing that Mary's relative, Elizabeth, was going to have a child, and soon. Then he recited those awesome words, "For nothing is impossible with God."

Mary responded with the clear submission of the ideal disciple: "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said." There was no hesitation. Clearly Mary understood the significance of what the angel had just reported to her. She was not married. She was a virgin. And she was going to have a baby. What would her father say? What would Joseph say? She knew what her neighbors would say. But, if those thoughts raced through her mind, she dismissed them immediately. The Lord had summoned her for a duty and she would submit as a humble servant. That's genuine discipleship. No wonder she found favor with God.

Both of these birth announcements were tinged with scandal. Elizabeth went into seclusion for five months. And even though Mary gracefully accepted the announcement of her impending pregnancy, she left town hurriedly and went to where Elizabeth and Zechariah lived. Was she wanting to get away from the gossip? Had she told Joseph yet? You remember his initial reaction, don't you? He didn't believe her story. Matthew said Mary was "found to be with child through the Holy Spirit...

[and] Joseph...had in mind to divorce her quietly." It wasn't until he had made those plans that an angel appeared to him in a dream.

For Mary, as well as for Elizabeth, any hint of scandal appears to have evaporated as they spent the last three months of Elizabeth's pregnancy together. When Mary arrived at Elizabeth's door with a greeting, Elizabeth felt her baby leap in her womb and she was filled with the Holy Spirit. She sang out to Mary, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?...Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished."

In this scene Luke continued to demonstrate the relationship of Judaism and the Old Testament and Christianity and the New Testament. There was no doubt that a new order was emerging. God was at work. The ideal representative of the old covenant would give birth to the prophet who would bring that age to an end. Further, the ideal disciple would give birth to the promised Savior, and the fundamental characteristic of the new covenant — faith — was emphasized.

Mary then responded to Elizabeth with a song of her own: it is called the Magnificat from the first line in the Old Latin translation. Her song was rooted in Old Testament Scripture and was evidence of a heart full of faith. Mary's song did not dwell on what God had done for her, even though it did acknowledge "From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me." Instead, Mary called attention to God's sovereign activity. God was both a

(continued on next page)

# How to Achieve a Lifelong Marriage

**Paul Jarrett**

My wife (Patty) and I have been married for over 34 years. Recently we were talking about how lifelong marriages like ours seem to be becoming more and more rare. I suggested that before such marriages become extinct, it might be a good idea to write down some thoughts on how to achieve a lifelong love. However, I expressed my hesitancy to Patty about doing so because we still (I hope) have a ways to go before we will have achieved a lifelong love. I decided to go ahead and write this article only after Patty agreed not to leave me afterwards! Having secured that commitment from her, here are some guidelines I hope will prove helpful to you in your quest to achieve a lifelong love.

### *Make It Your Top Priority*

One of my favorite stories is about an octogenarian who, when asked the secret to his longevity, replied, "I didn't die." I believe

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(Announcements continued)

merciful and powerful God. Perhaps we would do well to pay attention to God's mighty deeds that Mary highlighted. He has scattered the proud; He has brought down rulers; He has lifted up the humble; He has filled the hungry with good things; He has sent the rich away empty; and He has remembered to be merciful to Israel.

What Mary sang about "God my Savior" were characteristics that would be shown in the life of Jesus. Luke wanted Theophilus to understand that just as Jesus was the embodiment of the Mighty One of Israel while He was on the earth, the church was (and is) to be the embodiment of Jesus. The mighty acts of God in the past anticipated the focused concerns of Jesus during His ministry, and they established the agenda for the church.

Are you a true believer? Are you willing to become a true disciple? Will you say with Mary, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said"?

Johnny Melton is a former editor of Carolina Christian and now preaches in Washington, IN. He can be contacted at P. O. Box 15, Washington, IN 47501.

the first step towards achieving a lifelong love is quite similar to this man's secret to long life. If you want to stay married, don't get a divorce!

I don't believe it is mere coincidence that the divorce rate is so high in a culture which accepts divorce as a norm. If you want to achieve a lifelong love, you must make commitment to the relationship your #1 priority. Notice, I did not just say that you must make it a priority. I said you must make it your #1 priority.

Most couples will include "till death do us part," in their wedding ceremony. It is a priority. However, they also approach the marriage with a number of other expectations. While it is not wrong to expect more from a marriage than just staying together, problems arise when one or more of these other expectations takes precedent over the commitment that has been made to stay together "till death do us part."

Other expectations which can lead to the break-up of a marriage when they take precedent over the pledge that has been made to stay together can include expectations regarding sex, money, family, and the spouse's role. A blanket term for all of these other expectations might be the word "happy." It is my observation that the number one priority of many individuals in today's world is personal happiness. Many of these people carry this priority into marriage. They marry because they feel they have found someone with whom they can "live happily ever-after." There is certainly nothing wrong with wanting to live happily with your spouse. In fact, I will have great deal to say about how to achieve this goal of happiness later in this article. However, it is important to recognize that the emphasis in entering into marriage needs to be placed on the "ever-after" and not the "live happily," if the marriage is going to last a lifetime. My reasons for saying this will become obvious as you read on. For now, let me simply point out how marriages in cultures where parents arranged the marriage endured far longer than marriages in our culture where people have the freedom to choose a spouse who makes them happy.

If your immediate reaction to what I just wrote was to protest and say of arranged marriages, "They were not happy marriages," then you may want to consider what priority you are placing on achieving a lifelong love. You might also want to consider whether couples in those arranged marriages were any less happy after awhile than today's couples who set sail initially on a sea of wedded bliss only to end up shipwrecked on the rocks every couple encounters over the course of a lifetime.

I believe it is worth noting that the only thing Jesus said about marriage while he was on earth was to focus on the life-long commitment which God intended from the beginning (see Matthew 19:4-6). My own observation and personal experience has convinced me that the first step to achieving a lifelong love is to make it your #1 priority.

### *Find Someone Who Shares Your Priorities*

A lifelong love cannot be achieved alone. It takes two to make a marriage work. Therefore, you must find someone who shares your commitment to making "till death do us part" the top priority in marriage. I have known a number of divorced people who never intended to be divorced. They did not want a divorce, but their spouse did. If they had had their way, there would have been no divorce. However, you cannot force someone who wants out of a marriage to stay married.

While the need to have two committed people is obvious, what is not so clear is how to find that person who shares your commitment to a lifelong love. You can ask, but many a vow of love and commitment has proven to be just words in a ceremony when a spouse decides they want a divorce. How can you know someone means it when they say they want to spend the rest of their life with you?

First, I would suggest that you need to assess your ability and that of your prospective spouse to "forsake all others." If he/she shows a greater attachment to others than he/she does to you then you should be cautious of his/her ability to enter into a lifelong relationship with you. In initiating the marital relationship, God said a man was to "leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife." In a similar way, the wife's desire is to be for her husband. The marital relationship is to take precedent over every relationship other than our relationship with God. When a man or a woman places their relationship with parents, friends, or even children ahead of their commitment to each other their ability to maintain a lifelong love is at risk.

Second, I would suggest that you need to assess the ability of the other person to cleave to you in the manner prescribed in Genesis 2:24 when God spoke of the man and the woman becoming one flesh. Some danger signs to look for include such things as references to "needing my own space," putting their own interests and desires ahead of your needs, and wanting to be with you only when they choose to be. The other side of this coin is when the other person wants to exercise absolute control over your time and activities, and they are jealous and resentful of any attention you show to anyone or anything else. That is clinging and clutching, not cleaving!

Third, you need to observe their actions and listen carefully to all that is being said by a prospective spouse. It is a true proverb which says, "Talk is cheap." Someone may claim they want to spend the rest of their life with you, but if their actions are saying otherwise, you need to listen to their deeds. Also, you need to be careful not to fall victim to a hidden agenda by someone who is baiting the hook with talk of a lifelong commitment. We are all familiar with stories of teenage boys who pledged their love to a girlfriend only as means of achieving a sexual conquest. Unfortunately, this is not just happening to teenagers.

### *Don't Settle For Less*

I recently came across an article which contained the results of a study conducted by the University of Wisconsin of couples who cohabit before marriage. This study confirmed what others had noted, that those who cohabit prior to marriage are 50% more likely to divorce than those who do not. They also reported that only 15 out of every 100 cohabiting couples were married after a decade.

I have cited the results of this study to make the point that a lifelong commitment is not something that you can just slide into, yet it seems that some are trying to do so. I say that because the same article which reported the dangers of cohabiting also noted that women who professed strong religious convictions were as likely to cohabit as women who professed no such convictions. This was not the case with religious men who were far less likely to cohabit than men with no religious scruples. The explanation for this was that it seems that even religious women are being convinced by men that in order to achieve a lifelong commitment from a man they must make concessions to his desire for a sexual relationship. Unfortunately, as the data from the aforementioned study suggests, it is not working. Not only are those who cohabit less likely to achieve a lifelong relationship, the same study indicated that women in these relationships face higher levels of depression, lower levels of communication, and are 60% more likely to be assaulted [Terry Mattingly, Naples Daily News, p. 4B, 8/31/02].

### *God Always Has a Reason*

One thing I have learned over the years is that God always has a reason for what He says. I may not always immediately understand and/or appreciate that reason, but I have always found that it exists. I mention that here because if anyone hopes to achieve a lifelong love, they must accept the fact that God has His reasons for placing the sexual relationship within the context of marriage.

He did not do so to frustrate anyone. Nor did He do so in order to empower anyone to use this strong desire to entice or trap someone into getting married. He did so in order to make the marital relationship unique from every other relationship. If marriage is to be the lifetime relationship God intended, we must learn to do as Paul instructed when he wrote, "It is God's will…that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn how to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust..." (I Thessalonians 4:3-5).

If we are to avoid sexual immorality, we must learn to do more than "just say no." We must come to see the context in which God placed the sexual relationship, and we must appreciate why He did so. The sexual relationship is when two people become one flesh. It is to come at the conclusion of the journey two people have made towards entering into a lifetime commitment. If it comes before that journey is completed, the ability to achieve a lifelong love may be seriously compromised.

### *Learning to "Make Love" as God Intended*

The inability of so many to achieve a lifelong love may be attributed to the fact that we are not teaching people how to make love in the manner prescribed by God. "Making love" has become a euphemism in our society for "having sex," but having sex is not the moral equivalent of making love. The single greatest failure of sex education in this country lies in the fact that we are focusing on the physical aspects of the sex act while ignoring the moral context in which God intended the act to be enjoyed. The fruit of this is seen in the consequences of immorality which abound in our nation. We see the consequences of premarital and extramarital sex. However, troubled marriages and the divorce rate indicate that even those who do marry often do not know how to make love.

Making love in the manner God prescribed calls for us to first appreciate the fact that love has more than one meaning. Love can refer to the sexual relationship. Love can also refer to the romance and the excitement of being "in love." Love can also be descriptive of the warmth and closeness we feel for our friends. Love can also be a sense of loyalty that we have towards those people and things we hold dear. While all of these forms of love will be found in a lifelong love, there is another type of love that is essential to an enduring relationship. Christians know this love by its Greek name — agape. It is the love which the apostle Paul was describing when he wrote:

"Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails..." (I Corinthians 13:4-8).

Agape is the love of commitment. It is the glue which holds a lifelong love together. In the best of marriages there may be times when the heat of sex is diminished and the excitement of romance is lacking. There may be times that try our friendship and our loyalty. On these occasions agape love can see us through. Agape can rekindle the flames of passion. Agape love can restore the romance. The agape love which causes us even to love our enemies can certainly see us through those times when we may feel alienated from our best friend. Agape love enables us to pass the test when our spouse may need our loyalty the most.

Over the course of a lifetime there may be times when we are tempted sexually. There may be times when we experience the lure of a romantic infatuation. We may be enticed to place other friends ahead of our spouse, giving another the place which is reserved for our mate. On such occasions, it is agape love that enables us to resist those temptations. There may be times when our spouse may be at fault for failing to meet our sexual and romantic needs, or be the loyal friend we need. At such times we may feel justified in saying that we do not love them. A failure to love our spouse with agape love, however, always says more about us than it does about our spouse.

When we say we no longer love our spouse with agape love, we are saying we no longer want to be patient with them and we no longer intend to treat them with kindness. We are saying we are now jealous of them, and are ready to behave in an arrogant and discourteous manner towards them. We are saying we want to have our own way and we are provoked to the point that we can now focus only on the wrongs we have suffered. We are saying that we intend to take delight in whatever evil may befall them, and we no longer have an interest in the truth. We are no longer willing to bear our part in making the relationship work. We no longer believe in them, and we have no hope for our future together. We no longer plan to put up with what we may have endured in the past. Our love for our spouse has failed.

There is no doubt that the feelings I have described in the preceding paragraph do occur. When they do all hope for a lifelong love is lost. However, it is important for us to admit why hope is lost. It is not just because the sex and the romance have failed. It is not just because we have grown apart as friends and are no longer loyal to one another. It is because we have stopped making love the way God intended.

### *The Happiness God Intends For Us*

Learning to make love the way God intended paves the way for our achieving the kind of happiness that can only be found in a lifelong love. The kind of happiness that I am speaking of is the kind Jesus had in mind when He spoke of a joy that cannot be taken from us (John 16:22). This joy goes far beyond the pleasure which many people have in mind when they talk about being happy. Pleasure depends on the outward circumstances which produce an enjoyable sensation or emotion. The joy Jesus spoke of is a fruit of the Spirit and comes from within.

The reason so many couples fail to live happily ever after can be traced to this basic misconception as to how happiness is achieved. Many individuals feel happiness in marriage is a product of the right circumstances and the right spouse. Consequently, when they experience any unhappiness they assume it is either the fault of their circumstances or their spouse. Therefore, the only way for them to find happiness is to change their circumstances or their spouse.

If you are going to achieve a lifelong love, you must rethink the source of happiness. You must be willing to take personal responsibility for your own happiness. You must learn how to be content in every situation. You must learn how to "rejoice in the wife [or husband] of your youth… and be exhilarated always with her [his] love" (Proverbs 5:18ff,19ff). If I may, let me offer you some suggestions as to how to do this.

### *If You Want to Live Happily Ever After*

**First, realize that circumstances and people change over the course of a lifetime.** While we have all been warned of the danger of marrying someone thinking that we are going to change them, it is equally important to realize that the person we marry will change. Some of this change is just the natural progression of life. People age. Their looks change. Their health changes. In addition to these physical changes, you can also anticipate that changes may occur in respect to finances, family, friendships, education and/or employment, and interests. This does not even take into account changes of opinions, personality and views on life and religion. Hopefully these changes will mostly be for the better, but not always. The fact that these changes will occur is a key reason why you cannot base your happiness on circumstances or your spouse. If you want to live happily ever after, you must learn to adapt to these changes. You must grow together, or you will most certainly grow apart.

**Second, stay focused on the kind of happiness to be found only in a lifetime together.** After writing, "rejoice in the wife of your youth… and be exhilarated always with her love," Solomon went on to ask, "Why should you be exhilarated with an adulterous?" (Proverbs 5:20f). Notice, Solomon did not deny that exhilaration and excitement could be found in an adulterous relationship. However, he asked the question that needs to be considered by anyone who is contemplating becoming involved in such a relationship. Why do you want to do it? Are you willing to trade the happiness and joy to be found in a lifelong love for what is described in Hebrews 11:25 as "the fleeting pleasures of sin" (RSV). Many men and women have lived to regret sacrificing the greater happiness to be found in having the love and respect of their family and friends on the altar of sensual pleasure.

**Third, we must learn to stoke the fire of the family hearth.** When a man and a woman first fall in love the passion may burn like a bonfire. In a good marriage there will continue to be times set aside for a bonfire. But, a lifelong love is built around a fire in the hearth. Bonfires burn brightly, but the flame dies in a short time because it is impossible to maintain the amount of fuel it takes to sustain such intense heat. On the other hand, the fire that is built in a hearth may not always burn as brightly, but it can be sustained and it serves many purposes. It can be used for cooking, warmth, light, comfort, and social interaction. In like manner, a lifelong love may not always have the heat of first love, but it can provide so much more for those who share such a love.

**Fourth, avoid the "grass is greener" mentality that leads to the kind of second-guessing that prevents so many from achieving a lifelong love.** The kind of one-and-only love of a lifetime that you read about in fairy tales and romance novels is exceedingly rare, if it exists at all. The truth is, over the course of a lifetime most of us will experience some level of physical attraction to a number of people. These infatuations may be intense, but are generally of short duration. Research suggests that such 'chemistry' lasts only for about 12-18 months. However, that can be more than enough time to destroy a lifelong love if we allow ourselves to second-guess the commitment we have made to our spouse. Danger lurks when someone begins to question their choice of a spouse. When this occurs it is time for a reality check. The number of second marriages that end in divorce and the testimony of those who wish they had worked harder at staying married should tell us that the grass in not always greener.

**Fifth, avoid negative emotions and walk in love.** Ephesians 4:31-5:2 is must-reading for anyone who wants to achieve a lifelong love. The apostle Paul told husbands, "Love your wives and do not be embittered against them" (Colossians 3:19). It is said of the excellent wife, "She does him [her husband] good and not evil all the days of her life" (Proverbs 31:12). A lifelong love cannot be achieved in a heart where negative emotions such as bitterness and wrath and anger are allowed to take root and grow. Whenever these emotions spring up they must be cut down with the scythe of forgiveness. Kindness and love must take their place. In even the best of marriages there will be times when harsh words are spoken and unkind acts are committed. When this occurs, we must be careful not to dwell on our own hurt and the harm that has been done to us. Instead, we must be tenderhearted and ready to acknowledge our own mistakes. We must be forgiving even before forgiveness is requested, knowing that Jesus forgave us in that same manner.

**Finally, we must renew our commitment every day.** In the preface I half-jokingly expressed my hesitancy about writing this article because Patty and I have not yet achieved a lifelong love. Knowing we may have a ways to go keeps me humble. I know that Patty and I will have to continue to love each other every day till death claims one of us if we are to achieve a lifelong love. This calls for a daily renewal of our commitment to each other and a willingness to work on our marriage every day. In order to have a spouse you can count on being there for you, you must be a spouse that can be counted on to be there. It may sound somewhat paradoxical, but let me say that in order to be able to take your marriage for granted, you must never take your marriage for granted.

### *Dedication*

I have written this article for anyone who is wanting to achieve a lifelong love. I wrote it for me. I wrote it for Patty, my lifelong love. I wrote it for my children. I wrote it for my son-in-law, and for my future daughters-in-law. I wrote it for my grandchildren and for their future lifelong loves. I wrote it for those who are looking for a lifelong love and for those who have found their lifelong love. I wrote it for those who are divorced who thought they had found a lifelong love, but have now found themselves looking again. I wrote it for those widows (like my mother and my mother-in-law) and widowers who are saddened by the loss of their lifelong love, but also comforted by the memories of their lifelong love. I wrote it for my Heavenly Father who created us with the capacity to love, and who gave us the guidance we need to achieve a lifelong love if we will only follow His direction.

I pray that what I have written will prove beneficial to all to whom this article is dedicated.

Paul E. Jarrett can be contacted at 1450 Mandarin Road, Naples, FL 34102.

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# Spiritual Rejuvenation

**Clay Myers**

Over the past few weeks I have been overcome with much grief due to so many factors of my surroundings. How quickly we lose faith because of the situations we find ourselves in. Not too long ago I decided, like many of you, to take on the most difficult lifestyle one could choose. I became a Christian. We know that it is the only way to live, but that knowledge does not always make it easier.

I have been trying with much effort to get things going here at the prison; to be more of a presence for Christ. After all, that is our mission. The grief has resulted from my attempts to talk to others about Jesus. There are several divisions of the Protestant faith represented here, as well as religions such as Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Wicca (witchcraft), to name a few. As you can see, it is an environment with no small amount of tension.

The tension has become more apparent of late because I have increased my evangelistic endeavors. I am speaking out the wonderful name of Jesus like never before in my life. As a result, the devil is trying to counteract those efforts. However, Christ provides us with the greatest hope because we know who wins in the end! It is because of this hope that we can press on and contend for the faith (Jude 3).

Being bombarded by the devil and all of his tricks can be very overwhelming at times. It would be very easy to lose heart and give up the fight. However, this was not the spirit of Christ, or any of the apostolic examples we have in sacred Writ.

Webster defines the word rejuvenation this way: “To renew or refresh.” When we are overburdened or discouraged we must find a way in which our faith can be strengthened and rejuvenated. Lately I’ve been asking myself, “How can I be rejuvenated spiritually?” Just like any trial that a child of God faces, there is only one place to turn, the word of God.

Recently I was studying the first epistle to the church at Corinth. As I began my research into the purpose of Paul’s writing to the church there, I ended up in Acts, where we read the account of when Paul, on his second missionary journey, first came to Corinth.

When Paul first visited Corinth that magnificent ancient city was in tremendous spiritual darkness, not unlike many cities in America today. Julius Caesar, in 46 B.C., had set out to rebuild the city. By the time Paul arrived there in 52 A.D., Corinth had been re-established as an amazing city of wealth and influence. It’s temples and civic buildings glittered as of old and the same luxuries and vices reappeared and flourished in all their ancient vigor. Cultic religion had given sanction to sexual immorality. It is recorded that in the temple of Venus there were more than a thousand prostitutes who, in honor of the goddess, offered themselves for hire to any and all who came to the temple. Temple prostitution contributed greatly to the city's growth and wealth. Knowing that Paul had thrust himself into this environment, it is no wonder that he said, "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." The situation he was in was not unlike what he had experienced in Athens (Acts 17:16-29).

It was in this study that I found strength and a means of spiritual rejuvenation. In Acts 18:9-10 the Lord Jesus came to Paul in a vision and said, "Be not afraid, but speak and hold not they peace, for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to harm thee: for I have much people in this city." How that must have renewed the apostle's strength! I know that it did, because as I read this I, too, was rejuvenated! Our Lord had told Paul not to worry; preach on, brother! Jesus had also told Paul that he had brethren to protect him. I, too, could appreciate this.

As brethren in the Lord, we must life each other up. I received this boost recently by receiving letters from some of you. This was no accident; it was providential! Our Father is greater than all and He will get us through these rough times. If we do not rely on God and his word, we will be let down.

Furthermore, God has told us He will never leave us nor forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6; Hebrews 13:5). These are God's promises by his holy word. If we look in other places for help, it will not be found. Total reliance upon God is required to be adopted as a child of God. Christ has made a way for us; it is up to us to take it. Many ask, "How can you believe something you cannot see?" I have a better question: how can you not believe in the One who has blessed you with the offer of life?

We need to realize that we are not always going to feel like "super Christians." We are going to get discouraged and weary. We cannot rely on ourselves to create a better environment, nor can we find any authority in men. Our source of encouragement and joy comes through the word of God, not just in knowledge, but also in obedience. We are to bear the burdens of others even when we feel overburdened. This is brotherly love, and this is the love of Christ in action (1 John 5:3).

So, when you are feeling beaten down and weary, turn to God and to all his promises that are able to give you perfect peace (Isaiah 26:3).

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# When the Going Gets Tough

**Kent Massey**

*Committment.* The nervous couple stands before the Lord, family and friends on their wedding day to pledge an undying love and unswerving devotion. A few years later their lives are shattered and the covenant shredded by an extramarital affair.

*Commitment.* The young ball player signs with the hometown team. The fans adopt this blooming all-star as one of their own. He plays for several seasons in the same town until his agent convinces him that the grass may be greener in a bigger market. "It's not the same game anymore where a player plays and retires in the same market," says the savvy agent. The player goes to a new city for more money.

*Commitment.* They have been friends since high school. They have shared good times and bad times. Their bond is one that is solid as a rock (or so they think). A misunderstanding creeps in and instead of fixing the problem, they want to affix blame to one another. They haven't in years.

*Commitment.* Our lives are molded by commitments that can either make or break us. And commitments come with a price. When the going gets tough, the tough get going, but many choose to get going in the wrong direction. Some dig in while others bale out. Times will come that will test our commitment.

Jesus demands commitment, and commitment to Jesus comes at a price. There will be times when his teachings will make us squirm when the path he bids us to follow is not the one we want to take. This was the context for one of Jesus' most haunting questions in the gospels. Jesus had just finished a tough teaching in John 6, where he challenged the crowd that "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." Their commitment was put to the test and the crowds began to leave him. The story continues:

"On hearing it, many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?' Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, 'Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe…' From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. 'You do not want to leave, too, do you?' Jesus asked the twelve. Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.'" (John 6:60-70).

The question that Jesus asked is heart-stopping. His voice filled with tenderness, yet firmness, as his eyes locked with his best friends, and he hit them where it hurts with, "You don't want to leave, too, do you?"

The Lord issues a challenge to us to check our motives. There is a big difference between being a religious consumer and a committed disciple. Religious consumers are after faith for what it can do for them. They make commitments based on conditions. But disciples follow out of a heart-felt response to the grace, love and mercy of God. The disciples' goal is not self-fulfillment, but emptiness of self. It is a sold-out commitment to seek the will of the Father and to be transformed into the image of Christ (Romans 12:2).

How can you tell if you are a consumer or a committed follower?

· Consumers are motivated by their needs instead of God's purposes. Earlier in John 6, Jesus had been teaching a crowd of 5,000 men plus women and children. They had no food and Jesus performed a miracle by feeding with only five small loaves and two fish. The people got more than enough to eat, with food left over. Their response to the miracle was an effort to make him king. He could supply their needs and to them that was reason enough to place a crown on his head. Jesus slipped away and went into a quiet place to pray.

The crowd was not going to be so easily dismissed. They found Jesus the next morning on the other side of the lake, but their journey was not based on a desire to know more about Jesus. Instead, they were driven to get more from Jesus. They did not go to express commitment but to see what else they could consume.

The old saying is indeed true, "It is not how you start but where you end up." If we are following Jesus because we want him to meet our needs, our commitment will be tested early and often. There comes a time in all of our journeys when it seems that Christ will disappoint us. He may not do things when we want them, nor the way that we want, and our commitment will be tested. If our commitment is based on our satisfaction rather than his purposes, then we will not finish and we will answer Jesus/ question by our actions.

· Consumers want Jesus on their own terms.

The crowds followed only when it was convenient for them. They sought to define the terms on which they would accept Jesus. They wanted to make him king but were not willing to surrender to his will. When they found that Jesus didn't meet their expectations, they dropped the crown and went away.

· Consumers desire a Jesus that they can crown when they want. A Lord they will obey when it's convenient. A Lord for which they set the agenda. A Lord who fits neatly in their theological box.

Committed followers, on the other hand, understand that once you call Jesus "Lord," you give up the right to define what that means. The task of the committed disciple is not to fashion the leader, but to follow the leader. We do not set the agenda or the criteria for salvation or discipleship. Jesus demands that we take him as he is, or we don't take him at all. Faith is not a buffet from which we can choose what we want or don't want. Commitment means that Jesus is Lord all the time.

· Consumers have no substance; just show.

It is possible to go through all the right motions, do all the right things, attend worship, hang out with Jesus, and still have a heart that is far from God. Judas stayed around to enrich himself by taking a little off the top from the moneybag. He stayed with Jesus, but he was a follower in name only. Judas did what only Judas wanted to do.

He enjoyed the fellowship of the disciples, but he wasn't committed. Judas even participated in the miracles and work of Jesus, but he wasn't committed.

Committed people know that the secret to following Jesus is staying in touch with the person of Jesus. Following him is not a show, but a life-style that will give our lives true meaning and substance. You want to be a committed follower? Are you like me and want to improve your discipleship? Let's close with the words of Peter and some principles he gives us on being committed followers:

· Where else? Peter asks, "Where would we go?" If we want to be committed, then we must look at the alternatives to Jesus honestly. There are no other alternatives that offer the hope, love, truth and mercy of Jesus. There is nothing that can take the place of Jesus.

· What else? Peter says, "You have the words of eternal life." Commitment is increased by listening to the words of Jesus regularly. This means an increased commitment to Bible study, small groups, Wednesday night Bible class and regular time spent in the Word.

· Who else? Peter exclaims, "You are the Hole One of God." Commitment means that we are willing to confess our faith in Jesus openly. That we are not afraid to call him Lord and proclaim his Lordship to a lost and dying world.

Unconditional commitment is the price that God asks. It is not the basis or merit for salvation — it is

(continued on next page)

# Brotherhood News

Mark Hudson

**Marietta, SC...** Barry Thompson will serve again as Chairman of the Board of Directors for Palmetto Bible Camp through the 2003 camping season. Barry reports that 860 campers attended the 2002 sessions at PBC. There were 44 baptisms.

**Mocksville, NC...** Jack Harris, Chairman of the Carolina Bible Camp and Retreat Center Board of Directors reports a successful program in 2002 with 1,225 campers and adult staff for the summer camping season with 124 churches of Christ represented. Nineteen were baptized.

**Columbia, SC...** Jon and Isharah Macon and their two children returned to South Carolina from mission work in India as tensions increased between India and Pakistan last summer. Jon had served as the director of the Chennai Teacher Training School since 1996. The school was started in 1985 and continues to operate with fifty students. Jon's father-in-law, Dennis Johnson, has been preaching for the North Columbia church of Christ in Columbia, South Carolina. Dennis will be returning to India with his wife Beth. Jon will assume the preaching duties for the North Columbia congregation.

**Fort Worth, TX...** Well known preacher, author and publisher Leroy Brownlow, passed away on Friday, November 8, 2002 at the age of 88. Brownlow was best know for his book, Why I Am A Member Of The Church of Christ. He suffered a brainstem stroke in 1993 and had been in a nursing home for the past nine years.

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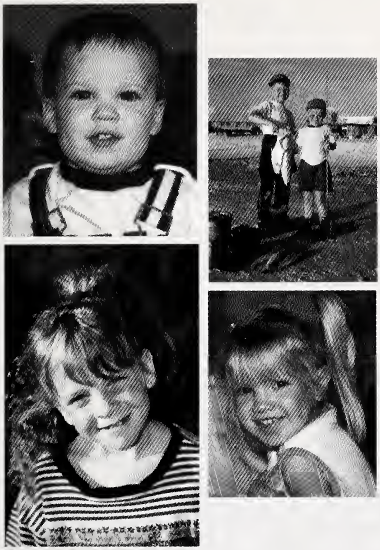
(Going Gets Tough continued)

ours because salvation is a free gift through Christ. Our commitment is the backbone of our faith.

A retired missionary from China recounted his experiences to a group of young people. He told story after story of seeing Christ do great things in the lives of people. After his lecture, a young woman came up to him and said, “I'd give my life to have your experience!” The old missionary smiled and said, “Well, young lady, that is exactly what it cost me.”

Commitment is costly, but it's worth it!

Kent Massey can be contacted at 4900 Providence Rd., Charlotte, NC 28226.



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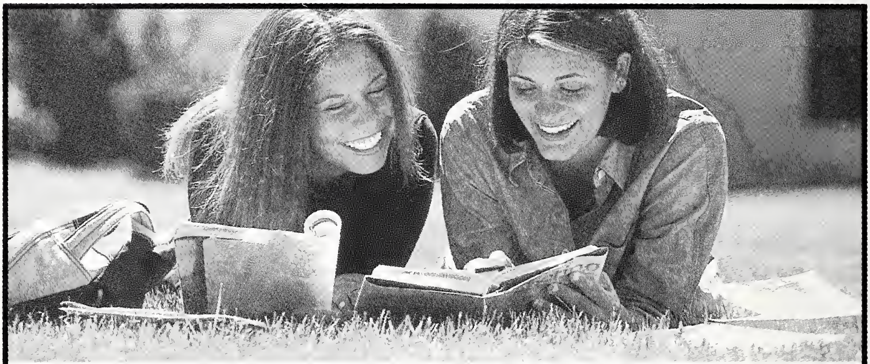

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